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Reforming higher education
in a post-Soviet context:
The case of Armenia

Vernieuwingen in het hoger
onderwijs in de context van de
post-Sovjetunie:
de casus van Armenië.

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Nijmegen**

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**Vernieuwingen in het hoger onderwijs
in de context van de post-Sovjetunie:
de casus van Armenië**

Een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de
Sociale Wetenschappen

Proefschrift

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aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof. mr. S.C.J.J. Kortmann,
volgens besluit van het college van decanen
in het openbaar te verdedigen op woensdag
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**Reforming Higher Education
in a Post-Soviet Context:
The case of Armenia**

An academic essay in Social Sciences

Doctoral Thesis

to obtain the degree of doctor
from Radboud University Nijmegen
on the authority of the Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. S.C.J.J. Kortmann,
according to the decision of the Council of Deans
to be defended in public on Wednesday, July 13, 2011
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In Honour of Harry Lockefeer

In Loving Memory of my Dad



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- **General Introduction**

CHAPTER

1



• General Introduction

1.1 Statement of the problem

At the turn of the 20th century, globalisation has necessitated fundamental changes in higher education. In their endeavours to establish and maintain the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economies in the world, the countries of Western Europe embarked on a journey of fundamental changes to higher education. In 1999, this attempt culminated in the launch of the Bologna process, which explicitly implied transfer of a particular model of higher education leading to the establishment of a knowledge-driven economy in Europe. Never before had the role of higher education in the economic and social future of the European Union been given such urgency (*Education & Training 2010*, 2003).

In tandem with this European wave of change, more and more countries joined the endeavour to modify their higher education systems and the innovations thus diffused beyond the European realm. In post-Soviet countries, the changes were intended to establish higher education systems comparable to the western ones but in a context which is obviously very different. The changes in Western Europe are aimed at the *improvement* of higher education and therefore doubly challenging for post-Soviet countries with very different higher education traditions and different political, constitutional and cultural contexts. In a post-Soviet context, substantial changes in the economic sphere have occurred and the need to adapt to the harsh reality of competition has required adjustment to the acute need for market self-regulation. The diffusion and transfer of educational policies peculiar to a market economy and prevalent in the western part of the world has been a result. In addition, the changes caused by globalisation have required deep and fundamental educational reforms and the adoption of new approaches to teaching, management and the organisation of higher education. After proclaiming independence, post-Soviet countries have thus faced multiple educational changes stemming mostly from the diffusion and transfer of the western type of education; the requirements for excellence in higher education in a market economy were sufficiently similar to make such changes inevitable (Heyneman, 2010).

As Heyneman (2010) has stated, the borrowing of policy is a very delicate matter and can even be counterproductive at times. Educational policy transfer and diffusion at the national level have immense consequences at the institutional level. While brought about by the needs of a country, the impact of educational changes for specific educational cultures can be very different depending on modes of the transfer and diffusion which occur (McLendon, 2003) and the environments in which the changes are planted (Bache & Taylor, 2003). Of particular importance is the extent to which teachers can make sense of the changes (Fullan, 2007), the extent of their involvement in the changes and thus their ownership, which largely determine the change outcomes (Spillane *et al.*, 2002; Hargreaves, 2005; Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005; Fullan, 2007). Yet another major factor is the role of educational leaders within the change context and, in particular, their leadership styles stemming from their change knowledge, ability to learn and capacity to handle the complexities of change (Spillane *et al.*, 2001; Fullan, 2004, 2007; Fullan & Scott, 2009). Learning about the context of change and exploration of those factors inhibiting and facilitating reform can thus help guide policymakers in their endeavour to design successful change policies and thereby promote the effective implementation of reforms.

The focus in the present research is on two key actors in the change process, namely the teachers involved in daily practice and the leaders steering the change process. The main aim was to understand the nature and quality of the implementation of higher education reforms in Armenia. In particular, an example of policy diffusion and transfer from western countries to post-Soviet countries and the success of the implementation process from the perspectives of the actual implementers, the higher education teachers, and their leaders was of interest.

1.2 The Armenian context

After the Soviet regime collapsed, the Armenian higher education - like all other higher education systems across the former Soviet Union republics - faced the harsh reality of transition, which can be characterised as a period of flux. First, the crisis of a planned economy and the move to the formation of a market economy

substantially influenced the operation of higher education organisations. The role of higher education, its functioning and its management, had to change to meet new demands. Next, globalisation trends and a strong desire to become internationally visible called for the diffusion and transfer of educational policies from Western Europe and North America. Furthermore, social impairments in the form of corruption threatened social cohesion and negatively influenced the higher education reputation (Heyneman, 2010). And finally, in addition to economic, political and social issues, the system had to deal with the legacy of several decades of a communist regime deeply rooted in all aspects of life and thus the culture, beliefs and values of Armenia (Kozma & Polonyi, 2004; Zelvy, 2004).

Geared towards establishment of an independent country and a democratic society, the Armenian government embarked on reconsideration of the whole architecture of the higher education system. And one of the steps towards changing the higher education system was joining the Bologna process in 2005 and thereby promoting Armenia's integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). However, the points outlined in the Armenian government program had been more or less introduced at leading universities in Armenia via pilot projects long before the Bologna Declaration was signed and had already found both approval and resistance among the direct implementers.

The actual reform process thus started in the early 1990s with the first steps taken via pilot projects conducted by some leading universities.¹ The reform initiative actually started from the bottom. In some cases, the change activities received support from international projects like the World Bank, Tempus, Open Society Institute, US Department of State and Education to name but a few. In most of cases, however, international consultants were brought in instead of building on the capacities of the local change owners, which — according to Fullan and Scott (2009) — may have made things worse instead of better as “the use of external consultants to lead change may not be cost-effective” (p. 39).

More specifically, the move from a planned economy to a market economy challenged the whole concept of higher education management in Armenia.

¹ There are 65 universities in Armenia, 8 of which have been leading educational change.

Formerly, the top administrative bodies at universities in Soviet countries had very little to do with the mechanisms underlying the management of the institution because most of the activities at the institutional level were centrally planned and controlled by the government. University deans or rectors did not know what was spent on their universities, how resources were allocated or how to improve efficiency because the budget and statistics were controlled by the ministries (Heyneman, 2010). With a change of university management paradigm and decentralisation, this very authority was devolved to universities, which had little capacity to handle the situation and therefore continued with the practices familiar to them. The result was a clear lack of vision for educational reform (Zelvys, 2004) coupled with an insufficient administrative capacity for change management. Coupled with that, a lack of guidance on the part of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) at the outset of the endeavour resulted — in most cases — in ambiguity with regard to what should be done, in what sequence, how and why. The entire, complex change process was reduced to merely technical conversions, with the content and culture left untouched. Naturally, the lack of carefully thought through approaches brought about confusion among the teaching staff and, therefore, resistance.

The situation found a different turn after the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 2005. The MoES now took the initiative. The changes outlined in the Declaration prompted Armenian higher education policymakers to embark on the journey of changing the structure and content of the higher education system in Armenia. The three-tier system with the bachelor, master and doctoral levels of study was introduced and became obligatory for all universities at the start of the academic year 2006-2007 (Ministry of Education and Science decree of December 14, 2004); innovative methods of teaching, management and organisation were encouraged.

The reforms undertaken for higher and postgraduate professional education were aimed at the education structure, curricula, management, modernisation of resources and management of the explosion of student demand for higher education (Heyneman, 2010). Currently, among the priorities on the Republic of Armenia (RA) government agenda is the development of a national qualifications

framework and quality assurance system comparable to European standards. At this stage, the government is aiming for reforming the system through broad involvement of the stakeholders and has established special committees to guide the reform process (BFUG, Armenian Report, 2007). The main mission of the committees is to research the current state of affairs in Armenian higher education, study the Bologna principles in detail, benchmark and provide recommendations for the universities. Attention is still not being paid to those responsible for implementation at the local level, however, namely the teachers.

In light of the above, questions thus arise about whether the changes presently taking place in Armenian higher education can only be characterised as top-down and mostly first-order. Most of the changes undertaken appear to be imposed on the actual implementers, the university teachers. They also appear to be largely first-order as the changes address only the more superficial elements of the classroom or the university system and do not stress the organisation to a meaningful degree. If this is the case, then the question arises of whether attempts are made to elicit the deeper changes required by current societal and educational demands or what Cuban (1988) calls second-order changes – changes, which go deeper into the structure of organisations and the ways in which people work together. This kind of change appears to be multifaceted and means changing attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, relationships and the manner in which people collaborate. And achieving such deep educational change is particularly complex and challenging in a post-Soviet context as it requires management at many different levels including the social and thus corruption, which — if overlooked — could bring the Bologna process to a halt (Heyneman, 2010). The aforementioned challenges thus raise the question of whether the desired changes are realistic in a post-Soviet country as deep change requires extra effort, which is something that is largely missing in the post-Soviet context.

1.3 Theoretical framework

To explore educational change, two streams of literature are relevant, namely: research on educational change and research on policy. Bringing in insights from both streams can provide a deeper understanding of such educational changes. And combining insights from the two streams can provide a more complete picture in the sense that those aspects overlooked in one can be revealed and enriched by the other and vice versa.

In the following, concepts stemming from the two research streams will be discussed. Educational change will be operationalised in terms of the owners of change, change knowledge and the nature of the change outcomes. Thereafter, a number of critical policy concepts will be discussed. It will then be attempted to integrate the relevant concepts into an analytic framework to provide a deeper understanding of educational change processes. Specific research questions will then be formulated.

1.3.1 Educational change

The literature on educational change highlights factors, which are crucial for the successful implementation of reforms: the change owners, change knowledge, dialogue and the nature of the change outcomes.

1.3.1.1 Change owners

For a reform to succeed, it is crucial that all of the stakeholders feel ownership for the reform process. Psychological ownership is an important predictor of individual attitudes and behaviour (van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). In the literature reviewed, four relevant groups of stakeholders can be identified with possible gaps. First, as Plank and Harris (2006) have noted, a gap can occur between the agendas of the researchers versus the policymakers. The gaps may stem from fundamental differences in the orientations and interests of the researchers versus the policymakers and lead them to blame each other for dilemmas. It follows, as Locke (2009) argues, that new approaches are needed to build relations between

the research–policy–practice nexus if the various communities are to develop a forward-looking perspective on the needs for research on higher education in the next 10 to 20 years.

A second gap that appears to cause turbulence is that between policymakers and the implementers of change (Goldwasser, 1992). When policy directives reach teachers without involvement of the teachers in their development, misunderstandings can arise and be seen to stem from the teachers' own frame of reference.

At the implementation level of reform, a third gap can be detected, namely a gap between the interests of the administrators and the teachers (Rosenblatt *et al.*, 2007). Once again, isolation of the teachers from the implementation process and the mere imposition of changes can result in ambiguity and compel teachers to follow their own agendas.

A fourth gap can occur between researchers and teachers. According to Zeichner (1995), educational researchers can be seen in many cases to ignore teachers and teachers to then ignore them right back. As a result, "people do not understand the nature or ramifications of most educational changes. They become involved in change voluntarily or involuntarily and in either case experience ambivalence about its meaning, form, or consequences" (Fullan, 2007, p.29). What Fullan implies is that change should be conceived of as multidimensional with many things at stake, including the beliefs and behaviour of those involved. "Functioning in niches" brings about isolation from a change and lack of a dialogue with the creation of tensions and misunderstandings as a result and thereby a threatened reform.

For the purposes of this study, we will concentrate on the roles of the policymakers, higher education teachers and administrators as the main actors in educational change.

1.3.1.2 Change knowledge

The driving force behind any kind of change is a deep understanding of the concepts, processes and values, which it entails. Only through a deep understanding can the targeted change be appreciated and followed. Fullan (2007) suggests that change can be viewed from two perspectives, namely in terms of *the meaning of the change* and in terms of *the change process* itself. Coming to grips with the reality of a change is required as underestimation of either the significance of the change or the required change process can result in dilemmas.

A missing ingredient in most cases is insufficient appreciation and use of what we will call **change knowledge**: understanding and insight about the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice. The presence of change knowledge does not guarantee success, but its absence ensures failure. (Fullan, 2004, p.2, emphasis in original)

In order to make a reform successful, both the subjective and objective significance of the change must be comprehended. Both the individual context of the reforms and the broader social forces influencing the change process must be understood. According to Fullan (2007), most strategies for change so far have failed to bring these different worlds together and therefore elicited only superficial change or complete failure. According to Fullan, moreover, the single guideline needed to change individuals and systems simultaneously is to provide more 'learning in context' and thus learning in the situations targeted for change.

With regard to the leadership attributes critical for successful reform and change, Fullan and Scott (2009) suggest that certain attributes and change-capable higher education cultures *must* mirror each other for the benefit of students and their futures but also the higher education institution and society. 'Change knowledge' should be used to guide learning and construed as the leader's capacity to not only "listen, link, and lead" but also capitalise on "modelling, teaching and learning" in uncertain and turbulent times in their organisations (2009, p. 97). Fullan and Scott (2009) further advocate the necessity of establishing a solid

knowledge base, which stimulates and integrates strong moral purpose and equally strong partnerships and relationships both inside and outside the higher education institution. In addition, deep change knowledge should create a cyclical approach to reform implementation — an approach, which builds upon the knowledge and experience accumulated in previous cycles in subsequent cycles.

Change knowledge in general and a practical understanding of the underlying mechanisms of change in particular can facilitate the change process. Without such knowledge, incoherencies and misinterpretations are unavoidable. And unless the efforts of the different stakeholders are joined in harmony to learn within the environment targeted for change, very little positive outcome can be expected.

1.3.1.3 Nature of the change outcomes

As a result of a reform endeavour, changes in structure, content and/or behaviour are typically expected. Depending on the attitudes of the implementers, the end result can be one of three possible scenarios: (1) no changes at all, leaving all the endeavours on a paper; (2) structural changes only; or (3) a sophisticated blend of structural, content and behavioural changes. Educationalists (Watzlawick et al., 1974; Fullan, 1991; Cuban 1988; Evans, 2001) who have investigated the flaws with previous endeavours have concluded that most of the projects have failed because they were aimed at first-order changes as opposed to second-order changes.

First-order changes are those that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what is currently done, “without disturbing the basic organizational features, without substantially altering the way the children and adults perform their roles.” *Second-order changes* seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together, including new goals, structures, and roles (e.g., collaborative work cultures). Most changes since the turn of the century have been first-order changes, aimed to improve the quality of what already existed. Second-order reforms largely failed. (cf. Fullan, 1991, p.29)

Second-order changes entail deep systemic changes, which modify the very way in which the organisation is put together by altering the beliefs and perceptions of key players and thereby their behaviour. Educational change is in the words of Fullan (2007), moreover, a multidimensional process in which at least three components come into play: (1) use of new or revised materials, (2) use of new teaching approaches and (3) alterations of beliefs. For successful educational change, it is crucial that the aforementioned three dimensions be involved. Together they represent the means to achieve a particular goal. Both Hargreaves (1994) and Fullan (2007) also mention the importance of *re-culturing* (i.e., teachers changing their beliefs and habits) and *restructuring* (i.e., first-order changes) for successful educational change and emphasise the role of *re-culturing* in particular.

While acknowledging the flaws, which can occur along the different dimensions of reform implementation, the need for congruence between the individual implementers and organisational changes must also be mentioned. Change dilemmas often arise due to insufficient depth and comprehensiveness at the implementation level. A prerequisite for successful reform is the creation of sufficient motivation and incentives for implementers to learn in context. As Sparks and Hirsh (1997) argue, individual learning and organisational changes should be addressed simultaneously and support one another. Otherwise, the gains made in one area may be cancelled by continuing problems in the other.

1.3.2 Policy concepts

Drawing upon policy literature, the concepts of policy diffusion and transfer are useful to explore the educational changes transferred from the West. The literature on policy diffusion commonly defines this phenomenon as a process through which policy choices in one country affect those made in a second country (McLendon, 2003; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). The direction of policy diffusion can be *vertical* or *horizontal*. And at the level of actual implementation, Bache and Taylor (2003) have hypothesised three manners of reacting to external pressures: *resistance*, *imitation* or *adaptation*. *Resistance* can arise in light of a strong organisational or national identity. *Imitation* may involve the fast and

largely uncritical adoption of new ideas. *Adaptation* may occur at the conceptual level, practical level or both.

Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, p.5) define policy transfer as a process by which “knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting.” Policy transfer stresses mainly the content of policy and the role of agency in the transfer of ideas and practices from one time or space to another while policy diffusion stresses the structure of policy. The relationship between policy diffusion and transfer can thus be, as Marsh and Sharman (2009) propose, dialectical, interactive and iterative. And in order to understand the processes of policy diffusion and policy transfer, it is thus imperative that their interaction be examined.

Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) identify two types of policy transfer, namely *voluntary* and *coercive transfer*. *Voluntary transfer* takes place when policymakers freely choose to adopt policies from another time or place. *Coercive transfer* can be further differentiated into direct versus indirect policy transfer. *Direct coercive transfer* occurs when external powers create a condition obliging a state or an organisation to comply with imposed policies. *Indirect coercive transfer* occurs when any of a variety of factors operate: externalities, technological changes, global economic pressures and/or international consensus. As Bache and Taylor (2003) point out, however, the process of policy transfer is unlikely to be exclusively coercive or exclusively voluntary but, rather, incorporate both in what is — in reality — a bargaining process between interdependent actors.

To further understand the impact of policy diffusion and transfer on policy outcomes, the following should be explored: what caused the transfer, where were things transferred from, who was involved in the transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006) and what was the policy environment (Bache & Taylor, 2003). Other factors to examine are the stock of political, bureaucratic and financial resources available in the country or organisation adopting a particular policy. Even with a shared national goal to guarantee successful transfer, prevailing policies, practices and the people involved can create constraints.

1.3.3 Tentative analytic framework

Inspection of the key concepts from the two streams of literature reviewed above reveals the following picture. The concepts derived from the policy literature can shed light on the processes of policy diffusion and transfer from more developed countries to less developed countries but provide little insight into the implementation of the transferred reforms at local levels. The way in which local actors make sense of reforms, construct collective meanings and actually implement changes can be studied more adequately using concepts taken from the literature on educational change.

Recent educational change research shows the quality of reform implementation to be largely determined by the quality of the dialogue between the actors involved — policymakers, researchers, administrators and especially the teachers as the key players in the implementation of a reform into daily practice. In order to understand this dialogue, attention must be paid to the change owners, change knowledge and nature of the change outcomes. Most of the innovation literature, however, hardly addresses critical policy issues. That is, the content and principles of reforms are often taken for granted and construed as quasi-objective. The concepts of policy diffusion and transfer can thus provide a more general policy frame for understanding local reform issues and putting them into sufficient perspective.

In the framework depicted in Figure 1.1, concepts from the two streams of literature on educational change and policy diffusion/transfer are integrated to provide an analytic tool. For the diffusion and transfer of educational policy (i.e., smooth integration and successful implementation of a reform), a number of features at the policy and implementation levels in particular appear to be crucial. That is, a policy is diffused or transferred from a different context and thus travels through both the policy and implementation levels to produce one of three possible outcomes: no change, first-order change or second-order change.

Central to understanding how policy diffusion and transfer take place is the dialogue between the change owners, which is strongly influenced by the change

knowledge of the actors. The quality of the dialogue determines the reactions to change and these, in turn, largely determine the reform outcomes and types of change.

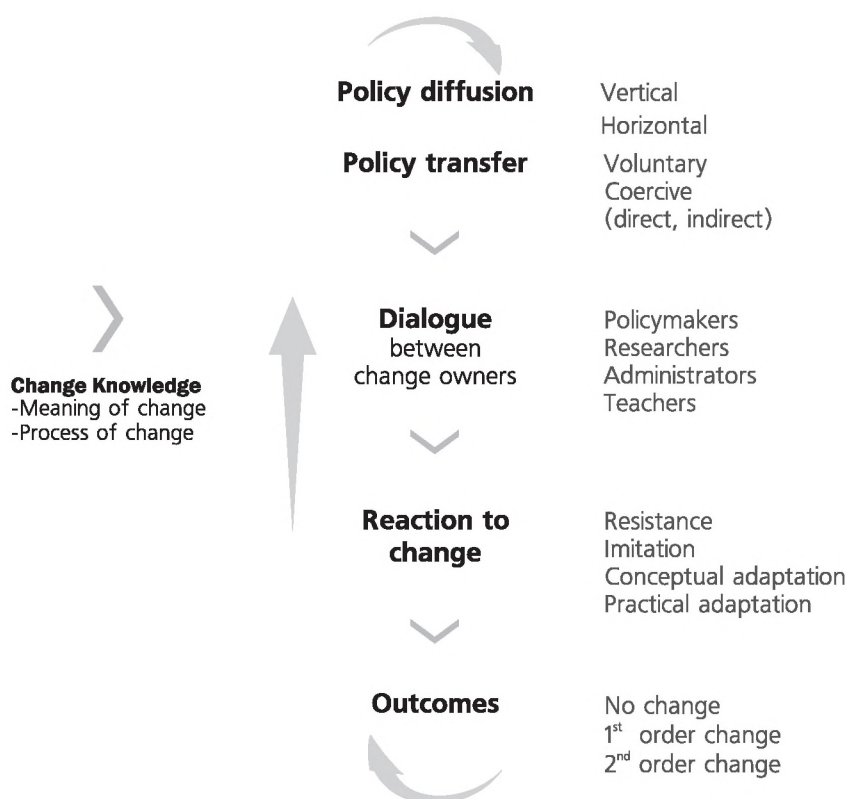


Figure 1.1: A tentative analytic framework of educational change

Three reactions to reform policies can be distinguished: resistance, imitation and adaptation. Resistance may most probably bring about no change at all or only first-order changes for the sake of 'checkout'. Imitation may similarly bring about only first-order changes in the long run as imitation runs the risk of missing the underlying mechanisms, which need to be adapted to the environment the policy

is being planted in. Adaptation, in its turn, may occur at only the conceptual level with therefore little or no effect at the implementation level and thus no tangible changes. Practical adaptation, in contrast, entails deeper changes and will thus affect the way people behave, their beliefs and their values.

The analytic framework outlined here emphasises that successful reform requires an active dialogue between the owners of a change. The dialogue must be fed by change knowledge or, in other words, insight into the significance of the change and the change process, which leads to a cycle of learning in context and the implementation of reforms with changes of behaviour and the practical adaptation of reforms as a result, which produces second-order changes. Such a frame of reference may provide for a higher probability of effective policy diffusion and transfer. As Fullan (2004) and Hargreaves (2007) put it, the existence of the components does not guarantee success, but their absence certainly dooms all endeavours to fail.

1.4 Research questions

The concepts from the theoretical framework outlined here can be used to understand the nature and quality of the implementation of higher education reforms in Armenia. In the present study, we examine an example of policy diffusion and transfer from developed western countries, the extent of the policy's applicability and the success of implementation from the perspectives of the actual implementers, namely the higher education teachers and their leaders. The context of the present study is a post-Soviet country, which has undergone higher education reform transfer from western countries throughout the past two decades.

The main research aim of understanding the nature and quality of the higher education reforms in Armenia subsumes the following three interrelated research questions.

1. How can the nature and quality of reforms undertaken in Armenian higher education be understood within the context of the Bologna process and

against a background of theories of successful educational change?

2. What are the perceptions of higher education teachers in Armenia within the context of reforms?

3. What are the perceptions of the higher education leaders in Armenia within the context of reforms?

In order to answer the research questions, research involving the following five phases was undertaken: (1) a review of the literature, (2) document analyses, (3) a survey of university teachers with both open- and close-ended questions, (4) a semi-structured interview study of university teachers and (5) a semi-structured interview study of reform leaders. Given that the specific research questions call for both quantitative and qualitative analyses, a mixed methods design was opted for.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

In this thesis, the results of four studies exploring the implementation of higher education reforms from the perspectives of the actual implementers in Armenia are presented. In Chapter Two, an answer to the first research question was sought: *How can the nature and quality of the reforms undertaken in Armenian higher education be understood within the context of the Bologna process and against a background of theories of successful educational change?* A review of the literature, a document analysis and an analysis of the responses to the two open-ended questions presented in the survey study were undertaken in order to do this. In the review of the literature, the relevant lines of policy research and educational innovation research were examined with an eye to constructing an integrated analytic framework to understand the nature and quality of the higher education reform process in Armenia. The analytic framework was then used to gain a deeper understanding of the driving forces behind the change process at both the policy and implementation levels in Armenia and the interrelationships between these forces at the different levels.

The document analysis was undertaken in order to gain insight into the reform rhetoric promoted by Armenian policymakers. The main policy directions

outlined in various documents were examined through the lens of the analytic framework developed as a result of the literature review. Finally, the responses to the two open-ended questions posed in the larger survey undertaken as part of this research were analysed to provide further insight into the nature and quality of the higher education reforms undertaken in Armenia.

Chapters Three and Four address the second research question: *What are the perceptions of higher education teachers in Armenia within the context of reforms?* In Chapter Three, the results of a survey of 279 teachers are reported. The study followed a mixed-model design as it involved a questionnaire, which included both rating scales and two open-ended questions. The questionnaire was developed to further explore the concepts, which surfaced during the literature review and document analysis. The questionnaire addressed teacher beliefs about the reforms, teacher beliefs about organisational culture, teacher beliefs about teaching and learning, emotions and the teachers' change knowledge. The teacher's perceptions were examined, when possible, in terms of the analytic framework developed on the basis of the literature review.

In Chapter Four, semi-structured interviews were undertaken to delve deeper into the reform perceptions of 12 higher education teachers. The questions for the semi-structured interviews were derived from the previous three studies and special attention was devoted to the issues raised by the responses to the two open-ended survey questions. The teachers' change knowledge, beliefs about change, beliefs about the organisational culture, attitudes towards reform, emotions and causal attributions with regard to the success and failure of the reforms were examined.

Chapter Five addressed the third research question: *What are the perceptions of the higher education leaders in Armenia within the context of reforms?* By examining the perceptions of the change leaders (i.e., educational administrators), a complete overview of the higher education change process is obtained. The examination of the teachers' perceptions of the reform process in the previous study showed them to largely attribute reform flaws to external and uncontrollable factors, which obviously made the perceptions of the administrators responsible

for the implementation of the reforms (i.e., the ones to whom the teachers attributed the flaws) of particular interest. Semi-structured interviews were thus undertaken with 6 higher education leaders who initiated the reforms in Armenia. Once again, the analytic framework developed in the earlier phases of this research was used to examine the course of policy diffusion/transfer and the leaders' change knowledge, leadership approaches, emotional intelligence and causal attributions with regard to the success and failure of the reforms.

In the sixth and final chapter of this thesis, the results of the four studies are integrated in order to answer the main question in this research, namely: How to understand the nature and quality of the higher education reforms undertaken in a post-Soviet context. A number of theoretical and practical implications for successful higher educational reform are also summarised in addition to the strengths and limitations of the current research.



- **Educational Policy
Diffusion and Transfer:
the Case of Armenia**

CHAPTER

2



- **Educational Policy Diffusion and Transfer:
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When leaders and other participants are given opportunities to learn more deeply in context they have a chance of transforming the contexts that constrain them.

- M. Fullan

Chapter
Two

2

Abstract

This paper explores the quality of implementation of the West European Bologna reforms in higher education in a post-Soviet country. This process of policy diffusion is analysed using concepts of policy diffusion/transfer and innovation literature, attempting to combine both streams of literature. Despite strong motivation to improve the educational system, the reforms in Armenia are rather complex and hard to implement successfully. The main assumption was that the quality of the processes of policy diffusion and transfer was strongly determined by the quality of the dialogue among change owners and the required change knowledge that determine the dialogue. The analyses of the documents developed by policymakers and open-ended questions addressed to higher education teachers brought to the surface many problems relating to the dialogue among the change owners and the necessary change knowledge.

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2.1 Introduction

Higher education is experiencing a period of profound change including, but not limited to, transformations in its economic, social, technological and cultural environment. Currently, the entire concept of higher education has been challenged since it has turned from an elite genuine teaching and research center to a mass producer of graduates capable of functioning in a dynamic knowledge-driven society and economy (Tack, 2001, <http://www.eminix.emich.edu/-mtacklfindlay.html>). The Bologna process aiming to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe acts as a facilitator for the process in Western Europe. These reforms are also considered to be relevant for a former Soviet republic, Armenia, where the Bologna principles have been adopted enthusiastically to improve the higher education system.

Yet, geared towards a knowledge-driven society and economy, the reform process undertaken in Western Europe itself with the hope for a quick turnaround appeared to be sluggish and complex (Jones, 2000). Sluggish in the sense that, with the current pace, the European Union will fail to attain the set objectives. Complex in the sense that reforms undertaken are not up to the challenges for adapting to the education and training systems of a knowledge-driven society and economy in spite of all the efforts made (Education and Training 2010, 2003). While making progress, the Bologna process departed from its original limited and concrete aims and geared towards a more widened and differentiated agenda. As Wächter (2004, 273) urges, “the widening and extension of the Bologna agenda could lead to a dilution of the process, and could, in future, stand in the way of a targeted and rapid implementation”. Thus, the success of the reforms in general and their implementation in particular turns out to be endangered and questionable in Western Europe itself. With regards to the newer non-EU signatory countries in the Bologna Process, they face another set of problems, since they need to accommodate “an increasingly rich variety of

systems with regard to cultural norms, economic policies, organizational structure and GDP levels” (De Boer and File, 2009, 10).

The process of adopting reforms from other countries is referred to as policy diffusion and transfer. As will be discussed in this paper, research on policy diffusion/transfer shows reforms being diffused from other countries to be rather complex (Kingdon, 2003; McLendon, 2003; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). On the other hand, innovation research shows reforms being transferred from the policy level to the implementation level also to be rather complicated (cf. Hargreaves, 2007). Hardly any research in these areas, however, explores how reforms are being diffused from developed countries to developing ones. As Marsh and Sharman (2009) note, most studies tend to either deal with a subset of developed Western countries or use large data sets approaching global coverage. Most developing countries in Africa, Middle East, Asia and East Europe are only presented in those global sets or ignored altogether. However, many mechanisms underlying policy diffusion and transfer could be expected to be more fully explored in the developing world than anywhere else, providing different regional patterns and negative cases are accounted for. Moreover, research from developing countries themselves into the reform complexities in higher education is largely missing (Bache & Taylor, 2003). As will be shown, to gain a richer understanding of the reform implementation processes, it is useful to combine concepts from policy diffusion/transfer and innovation literature. The former strongly focuses on general policy issues while paying less attention to the mechanisms that play a role in the local situation (Bache & Taylor, 2003; McLendon, 2003; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). The latter often takes the general policy issues for granted while analysing in the detail the processes on the local implementation level (Fullan, 2007).

Against this background, the case of Armenia’s higher education is relevant to explore. Especially to analyse the actual results and the way teachers as key implementers perceive the current reforms. The case provides deeper insights into the mechanisms of policy diffusion in the context of a post-Soviet country,

where differences in culture and history play a role. Next to this contribution to research on policy diffusion and transfer, it is also practically relevant for policy makers in developing countries to understand why reforms in higher education from other countries are rather difficult to implement successfully.

This paper aims to understand the quality of the reform implementation processes transferred from West Europe to a post-Soviet country like Armenia. To explore this issue, first more context information about higher education in Armenia will be provided. Next, the theoretical background will be discussed, in which concepts of policy and innovation literature will be combined to analyse the case of Armenia, concluding with the central research questions. After presenting the methodology, the results will be presented. The paper ends with a discussion of the main conclusions in the light of the policy diffusion/transfer and innovation literature.

2.2 Context

The Republic of Armenia, like all other former Soviet republics, has found itself in a period of flux due to the many changes that have taken place throughout the last 20 years of transformation. The changes are taking place in the higher education endeavour to reform the entire educational system in order to promote the development of a democratic society. Besides the economic, political and social issues, Armenia has to deal with the legacy of several decades of the communist regime deeply rooted in all aspects of life - culture, beliefs, and values (Kozma and Polonyi, 2004; Zelvys, 2004). And this should be done while bearing in mind the four trends in global education: technology expansion, globalisation, competition and accountability. Against this background, the Armenian government embarked on reconsidering the role of its higher education system by prioritising high quality of education and the integration into the EHEA through following the Bologna Declaration principles.

However, the actual process started in the 1990s, long before signing the Bologna Declaration. The first steps were undertaken through pilot projects initiated by a number of leading universities. In some cases, these initiatives were supported by international projects like the World Bank, Tempus, Open Society Institute, US Department of State and Education to name but a few. It did find its support and commencement from the bottom. However, lack of the clear vision of educational reforms (Zelvys, 2004) coupled with insufficient necessary administrative capacity in change management and lack of guidance on the part of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) at the outset of the endeavour resulted, for the most part, in ambiguity of what should be done, in what order, how and why. Consequently, the entire complex process of change was reduced to mere technical conversions, while leaving the content and change in culture untouched. Of course, the lack of carefully thought-through approaches brought about confusion among the teaching staff and, therefore, resistance.

The situation took a different turn after the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 2005. The MoES has now taken the initiative into its hands. The current approach is focused on solving issues through broad involvement of stakeholders thus establishing special committees for steering the process (BFUG, Armenian Report, 2007). The main mission of the committees is to conduct research on the current state of affairs in Armenian higher education, study the Bologna principles in detail, conduct benchmarking and propose recommendations for the universities to proceed with.

The reforms undertaken in Armenian higher education are assumed to be of high importance and encompass the fundamental changes so crucial for knowledge-driven society promotion and European integration. However, with all the positive drives, the implementation modes designed by the Armenian policymakers at both national and institutional levels open up issues for further debates.

2.3 Theoretical background

To analyse the nature of Western European reforms in a post-Soviet country, it seems useful to combine concepts of policy research and innovation literature to gain a fuller understanding of the complexity of such processes. Transferring reforms from other countries can be understood through such concepts as policy diffusion and policy transfer, derived from policy literature. Using these concepts provides a frame to analyse the complexities of implementing reform principles transferred from other countries. However, less attention is paid to how those reforms are implemented at a local level. More specifically, the way the local actors make sense of the reforms, construct collective meanings, and actually implement the reforms can more adequately be studied using concepts from innovation literature. The main argument put forth by recent innovation research is that the quality of the reform implementation is determined by the quality of the dialogue between the actors involved, such as policymakers, researchers, administrators, and especially teachers, being the ones who are the key players in implementing reforms in the daily practice. To understand this dialogue, concepts as change owners, change knowledge and types of changes are relevant. However, much of the innovation literature hardly discusses the policy issues as analysed in policy literature. Often the content and principles of reforms are taken for granted or as quasi-objective. The concepts of policy diffusion and transfer provide a more general policy frame to put the local reforms issues into perspective. So, in the following the different concepts will be discussed, starting with policy diffusion and transfer, followed by change owners, change knowledge, and types of change. This section will end with an attempt to integrate the concepts into an analytical frame that will be used to understand the results. Finally the research questions will be formulated.

2.3.1 Policy diffusion and policy transfer

In the literature of policy change, policy diffusion is commonly defined as a process through which policy choices in one country affect those made in a

second country (McLendon, 2003; Marsh and Sharman, 2009). Work on policy diffusion mainly emphasises structure and research mainly focuses on exploring why some states either adopt or adapt policies more readily than others. In doing so policy diffusion places the concepts of immunity and isomorphy at opposite ends of a spectrum. Immunity hypothesis explicates that no policy diffusion can be possible unless the organisational or state unit is receptive to new external ideas (Bache and Olsson, 2001) whereas isomorphy hypothesis says that policy diffusion occurs quite easily and results in an efficient homogenisation process across states. Ultimately, the states and organisations become increasingly similar (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powel, 1983).

Policy innovation spreads can be either vertical or horizontal. Vertical policy diffusion occurs when the national government influences policies through either sending clear signals with regards to future actions or mandates, fiscal incentives or sanctions. On the other hand, horizontal policy diffusion occurs when states consider and adopt policies similar to those in nearby states (Daun-Barnett and Perorazio, 2006).

Bache and Taylor (2003) elaborate on three hypotheses of reacting to external pressures: *resistance*, *imitation* and *adaptation*. *Resistance* may be an expression of strong organisational or national identity, which can develop into the protection of established values, which may be seen as threatened by external ideas. Strong resistance can result in salient immunity to new ideas and concepts because of fear to lose, anxiety, and struggle.

Another way of reaction is *imitation*, which is in line with isomorphy hypothesis. In this case, the adoption of new ideas occurs fast and uncritically. In this perspective, the organisation is open for new fashions of organisational design and practice. The third hypothesis is adaptation, which indicates that diffusion is by far more complicated than the imitation hypothesis assumes (Bache and Olsson, 2001). *Adaptation* may occur on either the conceptual level or in practice, or both. However, a distinction may emerge between conceptual adaptation and practice.

In order to demonstrate an agreement with dominating ideas or concepts in the surrounding world, an organisation may simply accept adaptation conceptually. Yet, as Bache and Taylor (2003) argue, changes on the conceptual level may ultimately affect practice. They describe the process as ‘virus effect’ during which new ways of acting emerge slowly and imperceptibly in relation to the level of discourse.

Dolowitz and Marsh (2000, 5), define policy transfer as a process by which “knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting”. So, while policy diffusion puts stress on structure, policy transfer mainly stresses policy content and the role of agency in transferring ideas and practices from one time or space to another. The relationship between policy diffusion and policy transfer, as Marsh and Sharman (2009), propose, is dialectical, that is interactive and iterative, and while examining policy diffusion and transfer it is imperative to examine how they interact to produce outcomes.

Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) identify two types of policy transfer: voluntary and coercive. In its turn, the coercive type is further differentiated as direct and indirect policy transfer. *Voluntary transfer* takes place when policymakers freely choose to adopt policies from another place or time. This usually happens as a result of a perceived dissatisfaction with the current state, or policy failure. However, a clear limitation of this analysis is that it assumes that policy failure is a non-contentious and easily measurable concept whereas the definitions of policy problems that political actors provide are often subjective and ‘political’. *Direct coercive transfer* occurs when external powers create a condition obliging a state or an organisation to comply. The direct imposition of policy transfer on one country by another is rare. Yet, international institutions often play a key role in coercive policy transfer, which is particularly true in the case of Third World countries seeking financial assistance from abroad. *Indirect coercive methods* stem from a variety of factors: externalities, technological change, global

economic pressures and international consensus. In the latter case, “when the international community defines a problem in a particular way... then the nations not following the practice will face increasing pressure to join the international ‘community’ by implementing similar programmes or policies” (*ibid*, p. 349). However, as Bache and Taylor (2003) put it, the process of policy transfer is unlikely to be exclusively coercive or voluntary, rather it may incorporate both and in reality is a bargaining process between interdependent actors.

Further, to better understand the impact of the policy transfer on the policy outcomes it is also crucial to explore what caused the transfer, where it is transferred from, the people involved in the transfer process (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000), and policy environment (Bache and Taylor, 2003). Another major constraint is the stock of political, bureaucratic and financial resources available to the country or organisation adopting a certain policy. Therefore, even where shared national goals open up prospects for successful policy transfer, the environment with prevailing policies, practices, people involved in the process still brings about constraints. A particular attention should also be paid to the local implementers’ attitude, since the success of a change process depends on multiple dimensions including the extent to which the stakeholders care about it (Scott, 1990).

2.3.2 Dialogue between change owners

Ownership is a psychologically experienced phenomenon where an individual develops possessive feelings for some target such as an organisation (Pierce *et al.*, 2001). The idea of psychological ownership is a potentially important predictor of individual attitudes and behaviour (Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004). At its most effective, ownership has a ‘living definition’, which gives people not just a financial reason to perform but a reason to belong (The Ownership Culture Report, 2001, <http://www.ownershipassociates.com/ocr4.shtm>). For a reform to succeed it is crucial that all the stakeholders involved feel ownership of the process. Considering that the range of the stakeholders is broad and is beyond

the scope of this inquiry, the change owners whom we focus on in this study are policymakers, researchers, higher education administrators and teachers, since they are directly related to reform transfer and implementation.

In the literature reviewed, four relevant groups of stakeholders with the extant gaps between them have been identified. First, as Plank and Harris (2006) put it, is the existence of a gap between the researchers' and policymakers' agendas. The resulting dilemmas originate in fundamental differences between the orientations and interests of researchers and policymakers. What is of priority to policymakers are the answers to questions currently featured on the policy agenda, whereas researchers' interests are inclined to the questions they find theoretically or empirically interesting. "One consequence is that policy research contributes little to the policy debate, leaving policymakers to adopt policies that take little account of... scholarly research findings" (Plank and Harris, 2006, 39). The result is researchers placing blame upon policymakers for not considering research findings, policymakers placing blame upon researchers for failing to provide answers to the questions they are obliged to address.

A second gap that appears to cause turbulence is between policymakers on the one hand and implementers on the other, or, stated differently between policy and practice (Goldwasser, 1992). The directives developed at policy level reach the teachers, whose lack of involvement at the policy development phase causes misunderstanding of the directives because of their own frame of experience. Therefore, the teachers most of the time put the directives into life as seen through their own perceptions, which might differ from that of the policymakers' substantially.

At the implementation level, more often than not, a third gap between administrators and teachers creates dilemmas for intended changes (Rosenblatt *et al.*, 2007). Isolation of the teachers from the process and mere imposition of changes on them actually brings about ambiguity and compels the latter to follow their own agenda they feel comfortable with. Inevitably, ambiguity of reforms can

cause resistance on the part of the implementers, but, to resist, they, first of all, have to understand what it is that the directives require of them. In its turn, “to understand directives requires cognitive processes of implementation” (Spillane *et al.*, 2002, 389).

A fourth gap exists between researchers and teachers. Despite some isolated examples, there is a dearth of discourse between the two groups. In Zeichner’s (1995) words, in most cases educational researchers ignore teachers and teachers ignore them right back. As Evans (2001) states, there may be “a group of researchers [‘we’] who have learned more about school change, but such knowledge is not widely disseminated among the [implementers]” (p.4). “People do not understand the nature or ramifications of most educational changes. They become involved in change voluntarily or involuntarily and in either case experience ambivalence about its meaning, form, or consequences” (Fullan, 2007, 29). What Fullan implied is that change should be conceived as being multidimensional and there are a number of things at stake such as changes in behaviour, emotions, beliefs, goals, skills, attitudes, to name but a few. Therefore, the picture we now receive, let’s call it ‘functioning in niches’, brings about increased reasons for discord rather than a constructive dialogue, which may result in tension, misunderstanding and therefore failure of reforms.

Next, an anticipated question to pose would be to ask who the key owners of the reforms are. With regards to the ownership of reforms, if a change is to reach its goals then it is necessary for all the stakeholders to buy in, a condition, which is possible when the stakeholders feel they belong to it and are fully and collectively committed to it. What follows is the dialogue between the key stakeholders is a prerequisite for reform success and the more active the dialogue between the stakeholders, the more commitment can be expected and, therefore, the more dynamic and effective the change process is. The quality of the dialogue, however, is mainly determined by the change knowledge all actors have.

2.3.3 Change knowledge

The driving force of any kind of change is a deep understanding of the concepts, processes, and the values it bears, since only through deep understanding can the endeavors be appreciated and followed. Fullan (2007) proposes to consider change from two perspectives – *the meaning of change* and *the process of change*. The crux of change, as he states, is how individuals come to grips with this reality since underestimation of either the meaning or process of change eventually results in dilemmas in most of the cases:

A missing ingredient in most cases is insufficient appreciation and use of what we will call **change knowledge**: understanding and insight about the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice. The presence of change knowledge does not guarantee success, but its absence ensures failure. (2004, p.2, emphasis in original)

He distills this change knowledge according to eight key drivers for change: (1) engaging people's moral purposes; (2) capacity-building; (3) understanding the change process; (4) developing cultures for learning; (5) developing cultures of evaluation; (6) focusing on leadership for change; (7) fostering coherence-making; (8) cultivating tri-level development (*ibid*). What Fullan advocates is a holistic approach to change. He also cautions against the individualistic bias, the tacit assumption of which is if we change enough individuals the system will change itself since it will never happen. He calls for inquiries into the system *per se*: the single guideline he provides is that in order to change individuals and systems simultaneously, we must provide more 'learning in context', that is, learning in the actual situations we want to change (*ibid*). Actually, change knowledge acts as a facilitator of the change process without which incoherencies and misunderstanding are unavoidable. Unless all the stakeholder efforts are joined in harmony to learn the environment intended for change, no positive outcome of the endeavour can be expected.

2.3.4 Types of change

As a result of any educational change, usually changes in structure, content, or behaviour are anticipated. Depending on the attitude of the implementers the end result might turn to have yielded three possible scenarios: (1) no changes at all, leaving all the endeavours on a paper; (2) structural changes only; (3) or a sophisticated blend of structural, content and behavioural changes.

Back in 1974, Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch distinguished two types of changes, which they described as 'first-order' and 'second-order' changes. Educationalists (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1974; Cuban 1988; Fullan, 1991; Evans, 2001) who investigated the flaws with previous endeavours have come to the conclusion that most of the projects have failed because they were aimed at first-order changes rather than at second-order ones:

First-order changes are those that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what is currently done, "without disturbing the basic organizational features, without substantially altering the way the children and adults perform their roles". *Second-order changes* seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together, including new goals, structures, and roles (e.g., collaborative work cultures). Most changes since the turn of the century have been first-order changes, aimed to improve the quality of what already existed. Second order reforms largely failed. (cf. Fullan, 1991, 29)

What is actually underpinned by second-order changes is deep systemic change that would modify the very way the organisation is put together through altering the beliefs and perceptions of the key players and, therefore, their behaviour. Thus, the new paradigm (strategic-systemic) supported by such keen leaders of organisational change as Michel Fullan, Matthew Miles, Philip Schlechty and Thomas Sergiovanni derives from system thinking and strategic approaches to organisational development (Evans, 2001) and puts change knowledge at the heart of innovation success.

Moreover, as Fullan puts it (2007), educational change is a multidimensional process where at least three components come into play: (1) possible use of new or revised materials, (2) the possible use of new teaching approaches, and (3) the possible alterations of beliefs. For the change process to be successful, it is crucial that it takes place following these dimensions. Together they represent the means of achieving a particular goal. Fullan also underpins the ideas of *re-culturing* (how teachers change their beliefs and habits) and *restructuring* (that is first order changes prevalent in educational change) and emphasises the role of *re-culturing* in the success of reforms.

While acknowledging the flaws that can occur in all possible dimensions of reform implementation, it is nevertheless crucial to put an emphasis on congruence between individual implementer of change and organisational change. Explicitly demonstrated above is the fact that dilemmas of changes are often caused because of their lack of enough depth and comprehensiveness at the level of implementation. A prerequisite for successful reforms is, therefore, creating enough motivation and incentives for the implementers to learn in context. As Sparks and Hirsh (1997) argue, individual learning and organisational changes should be addressed simultaneously and support one another. Otherwise, the gains made in one area may be cancelled by continuing problems in the other.

2.3.5 Analytical framework

Figure 2.1 summarises and integrates the concepts discussed above. Central in understanding how policy diffusion and transfer takes places between a policy and local level is the dialogue between the change owners, which is strongly influenced by the change knowledge of all actors. The quality of the dialogue determines the reactions to change and this in turn determines mainly the outcomes: the types of changes.

Based on the theoretical concepts, the following characteristic features seem to be essential for describing an educational policy diffusion and transfer. There are

two main levels, policy level and implementation level, through which policies travel eventually resulting in one of the three possible outcome scenarios: no change, first-order change and second-order change. What determines the effect is the level of involvement of the change owners and existence of an active dialogue between them. With regards to the reaction to the policies diffused there are three possible ones: resistance, imitation and adaptation. Resistance will most probably bring about no change at all or first-order changes only for the sake of 'check out' and accountability reasons. Imitation, in the long run will bring about second-order changes, since by imitating the implementers run a risk of overlooking the essential elements, which need to be adapted for a better fit to the environment the policy was planted into. Adaptation in its turn may be at conceptual level, the consequences of which may have little or no effect at implementation level, since conceptual adaptation implies non-tangible changes. On the other hand, practical adaptation assumes deeper changes affecting the way people behave, their beliefs and values.

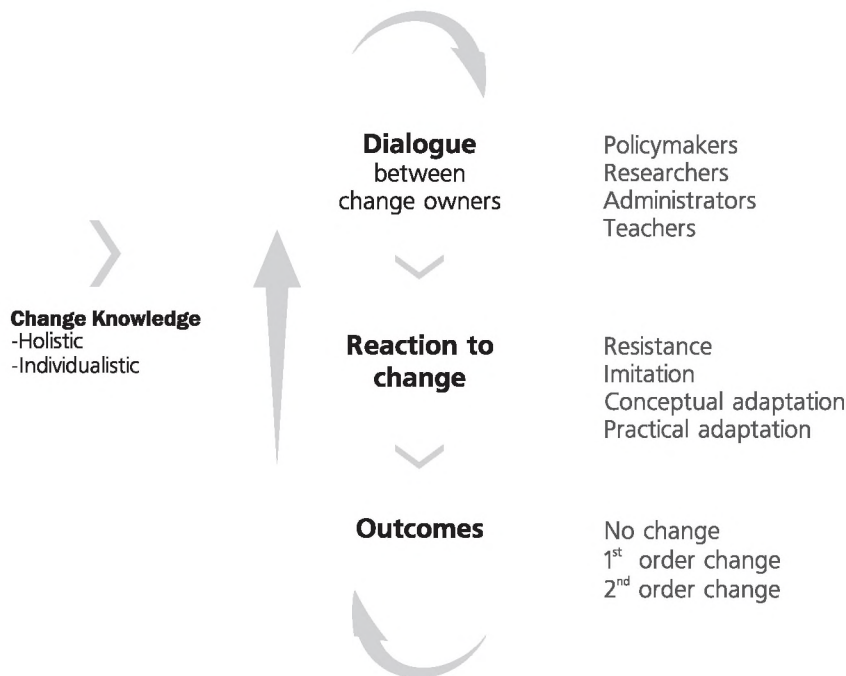


Figure 2.1: A conceptual framework of educational policy diffusion and transfer

What the framework underpins is for a reform to succeed, it is essential to have an active *dialogue between the change owners* if *changes in behaviour*, that is *second-order changes*, are to take place. Moreover, the dialogue should be fed by *change knowledge*, namely *meaning of change* and *change process* with its eight key drivers and a cyclical approach to learning in context. Only in this case is there a high probability of effective policy diffusion and transfer. The existence of the components does not guarantee success, but the absence dooms all the endeavours to failure (cf. Fullan, 2004; Hargreaves, 2007).

2.4 Research questions

In this study an attempt has been made to create a deeper understanding of the nature and quality of the Armenian higher education reforms in the light of the outlined analytical framework through answering the following questions:

1. What are the characteristic features of the higher education reforms undertaken by the Armenian policymakers?
2. How do teachers in the Armenian higher education perceive the quality of the implementation processes of current reforms?
3. How to understand the nature of the reform implementation processes in Armenia against the background of theories about successful education change?

For answering the first research question, the concepts of policy diffusion and policy transfer will be used based on the document analysis as will be described in the methodology section. To answer the second question, the concepts of change owners and change knowledge will be used supported by a survey. The document analysis and survey data will be used to answer the third question.

2.5 Methods

2.5.1 Data sources

Data for the first research question exploring the characteristic features of higher education reforms in Armenia were derived from a review of primary documents such as official reports developed by the MoES, UNDP, and relevant conference materials (*Education 2015: Restoring Armenia's Strength in Education*).

The empirical basis for the second question exploring teachers' perceptions of the reforms was formed through a part of a larger questionnaire study, namely the two open-ended questions exploring higher education teachers' change knowledge and perceptions about reform implementation.

By drawing relationships between the answers to the first and second questions, an attempt has been made to answer the third research question.

2.5.2 Document review

To better understand the way Armenian policymakers steer the reforms emanating from Western Europe, we examined the official documents, which provided a detailed description of the current state and the strategies foreseen for changing the existing educational system. The underlying principle for document selection was the extent to which they covered types of changes, namely first-order (the structural ones) and second-order changes (changes in the behaviour and culture). As a result three documents were selected:

- **Strategic Vision for Education: Restoring Armenia's Strength in Education** – developed by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2007. The document covers the overall aims, principles, and strategic approaches for the development of education and it became the foundation of Armenia's 2008-2015 National Development Program for Education. According to the document, reforms are to be based on strategies that achieve the greatest impact with limited investment.
- **National Human Development Report 2006, Educational Transformations in Armenia** – developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Report provides professional coverage and comprehensive analyses of Armenia's education system and proposes certain solutions and concrete steps to be initiated to achieve significant changes and tangible outcomes for ongoing educational reforms.
- **Law on Higher and Post-Graduate Professional Education, December 14, 2004** – the document introduces the new ideas aimed at constructing a modern model of quality assurance, accreditation and the definition of the ECTS system. It defines institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and the three-tier degree structure.

2.5.3 The survey

The data for the second research question on the teachers' perceptions within the change context were derived from a newly developed questionnaire (see Karakhanyan *et al*, 2010). We analysed the answers to the two open-ended questions since they explore the perceptions of the teachers about the current reforms through exploring their change knowledge.

The data were collected from university level teachers, with an emphasis given to the key universities in the republic that have complied, at least partly, with some elements of the Bologna Process. Overall, eight universities were included in the sample. There are approximately 3,000 teachers within these eight universities, and our sample targets 10% (300) of the overall number of faculty, enabling us to state that the sample is representative of the population.

In December 2007, 300 teachers were approached to participate in the study. 279 replies were received (93%); 67% (188) of which provided answers to two open-ended questions. Fifty per cent provided their names and contact information for further inquiries. The underlying principle for filling in the questionnaire was voluntarism and enthusiasm of the university management and the teachers. The high percentage of responses actually attests that teachers do care about quality reforms.

The sex distribution of the sample was 45.3% males and 54.7% females; the following two tables also indicate the age groupings and educational backgrounds.

Breakdown by age of respondents ^a

<i>Age range</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
21-30	37	13.26
31-40	46	16.49
41-50	64	22.94
51-60	73	26.16
61-80	44	15.77
No data given	15	5.38
Total	279	100

^a Figures adjusted slightly to give a total of 100%

Educational level of respondents *

<i>Level</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Master's degree holder	26	9.32
Full professors	26	9.32
Specialist Diploma (obtained after 5 years' higher education)	67	24.01
Candidate of Science	156	55.91
No data	4	1.44
Total	279	100

2.6 Analyses***2.6.1 Policy documents***

The documents reviewed are policy texts developed by MoES and different international organisations. The implied writers of the policy texts under review

are the organisations that have developed it rather than individual authors. What is actually relevant is that the documents in question bear the approval of the target organisation and therefore stem from their conceptions about higher education reforms.

Basically, first-order changes target improvement of the existing practices without going deeper into the changes of behaviour whereas second-order ones bring about behavioural changes and thus affect the culture of the organisations (Fullan, 1991). In this study we consider a change to be first-order change if it promotes structural changes such as a move to a two-tier degree system, integration of a system of credits, assessment. On the other hand, second-order changes are considered the ones, which promote behavioural changes, such as professional development, Life Long Learning (LLL), and endeavours to change organisational culture. In the analysis of the policy documents we concentrate on the extent to which each of the documents promotes first- and second-order changes.

The documents were analysed through content analysis (Denscombe, 2007) to decide the meaning of the texts using ATLAS.ti scientific software. The documents were first read with a focus on the policies projected, and then the text was broken down into smaller units after which the major policies were categorised based on the underlying concepts for first- and second-order changes (Fullan, 1991). Considering the first part of analysis is a tally of the items when various units occur (Denscombe, 2007), the frequency analysis of the units was performed (see Table 2.1). To provide for validity of the content analysis peer-debriefing of the results was conducted.

As a result of content analysis, the following distribution surfaced.

Table 2.1: Document analysis on first and second order changes

<i>Documents</i>	<i>First order changes</i>	<i>Second order changes</i>
Strategic Vision for Education: Restoring Armenia's Strength in Education, 2007	43	17
National Human Development Report 2006, <i>Educational Transformations in Armenia</i> , (goals of the present stage of reforms)	34	14
Law on Higher and Post-Graduate Professional Education, December 14, 2004	24	2

While developing policies for educational change a major emphasis was put on promoting first-order changes to create compliance with the Bologna principles. The overarching changes stressed in the documents were promotion of two-tier degree programmes, establishment of a platform for Armenian degree recognition, development of standards, ECTS integration etc. To some extent changes directly connected with faculty development and LLL were mentioned, along with the omissions extant in the current approaches. As mentioned in the *National Human Development Report*:

The HEI faculty training and qualification improvement process is currently *ad hoc*; as a rule, it is initiated by either the trainees or individual HEIs. The situation is even worse in primary and secondary vocational institutions. (p. 79)

However, the specialists that are trained in local or foreign training centres...rarely engage in a structural effort that would enable them to share with local colleagues the knowledge and experience obtained in such training programs. (p. 79)

The Armenian legal provisions on supplementary education do not adequately reflect on the concept, goals, objectives, policy goals, and implementation mechanisms of either Life Long Learning or adult education. (p. 94)

Another example of second order changes is underpinning the idea of changing the culture stressed out in *the Strategic Vision for Education: Restoring Armenia's Strength in Education* (2007):

- Avoid wholesale, top-down reforms in favour of more feasible targeted approaches.
- Implant centres of excellence as 'seeds of change' inside institutions and networks.
- Design these to grow from within, replacing or being absorbed into existing structures over time.(p. 8)

2.6.2 The survey

The questionnaire *Teachers' Perceptions within a Change Context* consists of 79 items. Items 59 and 60 within the *Teacher Change Knowledge* scale are open-ended questions and the teachers were asked to list at least three aims of the reform (item 59), to explore the extent to which teachers understand the *meaning of change*, and three pitfalls (item 60), to explore what happens at the level of *change process* from the teacher perspectives.

First of all the issue of coding the open-ended responses was addressed. For the first question, the codes were grouped into four categories. The same procedure was followed for the second question and four main categories were identified. The data were analysed using descriptive and frequency statistics.

In total 188 teachers (70% of the teachers) opted to respond to the two open-ended questions; 46.8% (88 teachers) were males and 52.1% (98 teachers) were females. In general, we anticipated to get at least 900 responses (300 teachers

x 3 responses) for each question. The resultant output was 177 teachers (94.1%) out of 188 provided one or more answers to the question regarding the meaning of change, in total 490 responses. In total, 158 (84%) out of 188 provided answers to the question regarding the process of change, 438 responses. Therefore, the results have a potential both for generating hypotheses about these issues, their dimensions and interrelationships and for grounding conceptual understandings of a general picture of the current state, thus addressing the issue of generalisability. Also, in this case, for reasons of validity peer-debriefing between the three authors was used.

The first open-ended question, (item 59: *What are the aims of reform? List at least three aims*), was supposed to reveal the extent to which the teachers are informed about *the meaning of change*. The categories identified for the answers to the question were as shown in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2: Teachers' perceptions of the reform goals

Category	Number of responses	Percentage
Promoting quality education	233	47.5
Integration into EHEA through compliance with Bologna principles	150	30.6
Improving society through improving educational system and thus learning of all citizens	79	16.1
Have no idea what the reform is about	28	4.3

The answers to the first open-ended question reveal 47.5 % of the responses were about promoting quality of education through changes in curricula, assessment methods, teaching and learning practices. Next, 30.6 % of the responses were about integration into the EHEA through following the Bologna principles. To a lesser extent (16.1 %), improving society through improving educational system and thus learning of all citizens was mentioned. Yet, 4.3 % of the responses were mere statements about the absence of any idea of what reform is about because of the lack of the appropriate background:

*I have difficulty in answering this question since I have no idea.
(EU:23)*

The second open-ended question, (item 60: *What hinders successful implementation of reforms? List at least three problems*), with four categories mainly shows teachers' perceptions about *the change process*. The distribution of the frequencies is as shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Teachers' perceptions of implementation problems

Category	Number of responses	Percentage
Lack of appropriate background for reform successful implementation	186	42.5
Flaws in reform implementation	119	27.2
Negative impact of reforms	107	24.4
Have difficulty to answer the question	26	5.9

While mentioning the pitfalls, 42.5% of responses stated the lack of appropriate background for reform successful implementation in the sense of lack of the legal framework, resources, and a preparatory phase. Further, mentality mismatch, noncompliance of curricula with market demands, poor state of secondary education, and corruption were mentioned. Another 27.2% of responses were concerns about implementation flaws, such as fast pace of reforms, neglecting the good Soviet practice, superficiality of approaches, distorted outcomes:

*The logic and essence of Western reforms are distorted during implementation in Armenian reality, besides, the fast pace of implementation results only in superficiality of approaches.
(LU:19)*

24.4% of responses were about the negative impact the reforms have:

The Western influence brings about strong decrease of moral

and educational criteria and standards as well as national values we have cherished for so many years. (LU:06)

5.9% of responses were statements about difficulties in answering the question because of a poor background about the changes undertaken:

I have difficulty to answer the question because of a lack of a good background regarding the system. (SU:03)

2.7 Results

2.7.1 Characteristic features of the Armenian higher education reforms

Regarding research question one, *what are the characteristic features of the higher education reforms undertaken by the Armenian policymakers?* we look at the reform implementation in Armenia through the lenses of the literature on policy diffusion. The findings show that *the ways* the reforms are diffused are vertical since the reform signals are sent to universities from the MoES in the form of future actions or mandates, fiscal incentives or sanctions (Law on Higher and Post-Graduate Professional Education, 2004). Policy transfer routes actually correspond to both *direct* and *indirect coercive transfer* types. Prior to joining the Bologna process, direct coercive methods of policy transfer surfaced since such international organisations as the World Bank, Open Society Institute, IREX, US Department of State and Education endeavoured to transfer the ideologies as well as the higher education policies characteristic of a democratic society:

The World Bank has been active in guiding and lending funds for education sector reforms in Armenia for close to a decade and is the only donor doing so at a systems level. The resulting Education Quality and Relevance Project aims to improve the national curriculum, general education standards and evaluation systems; integrate new technologies and methods into the teaching process; train teachers in modern teaching

practices; and restructure the administration and financing of the education system. (NHDP, p. 33)

Therefore, during the period of economic flux the policymakers found the financial contribution of such international organisations as a panacea for the problems encountered, which compelled them to follow the grant or loan requirements.

Indirect coercive methods of policy transfer came into play when driven by the global economic pressures, technological changes, and international consensus on higher education future, Armenia joined the Bologna Process in 2005. By this act Armenia agreed to comply with its policies in order to integrate into the EHEA and thus contribute to fostering democracy development, human rights protection and the rule of law in the country (Conference materials, 2004). The act was quite a challenging one for a developing country in transition period, which was still influenced by deeply rooted former ideologies.

In higher education integration into the EHEA and commitment to the Bologna process are at the basis of the agenda for reforms. The transition to a credit transfer system and a European university degree system are defining the course of progress in higher education. (NHDP, p. 32)

With regards to the types of changes prevalent, they are mainly aimed at first-order changes, that is structural, the accurate implementation of which, in fact, creates promising prospects for second-order changes. The lacking component in the Armenian case is insufficient attention paid to second-order changes that is changes in educational dimension aiming at the manner in which teachers really act, which stem from their sense making from and about reforms.

Albeit covered in the three documents reviewed, the sections which address developing a system of faculty training and qualification improvement, creating an environment promoting spontaneous reforms did not address questions of what is suggested (content) by qualification improvement or how (character) the faculty training and professional development will be offered to teachers. Actually, as mentioned in the *National Human Development Report 2006* (2007), the

changes proposed bear more of a declarative character rather than that of an elaborate action plan. In its turn, lack of explicitly developed mechanisms for second-order changes results in neglecting the latter. These overlooked and nonetheless crucial measures thus become pitfalls on the change transfer route and create reasons for ambiguity, discord and therefore, resistance and failure of the reforms.

Further, while examining *Restoring Armenia's Strength in Education* (2007), the pattern of overlooking the second-order changes became striking especially in the section of the vision that outlines strategies with the three main directions being *Environment, Seeds, and Networks*. In the *Seeds* section the proposal is to implant centres of excellence as 'seeds of change' inside institutions and networks:

These centers of excellence or 'seeds of change' are not experimental pilots or parallel structures. They are micro versions of best practices and proven approaches implanted inside existing structures. One of their fundamental aspects is that they are designed to quickly grow within institutions or networks replacing or being absorbed into existing structure over time. (p.9)

The tacit supposition of the statement is if 'we' change enough individuals the system will change itself. However, as Fullan (2007) argues, it will never happen. What lacks in the given strategic vision is a need for a systemic quest with the aim to provide more learning in the target context. This is especially fundamental if the policies developed are to promote a synchronised change of both individuals and systems, thus ensuring a holistic approach to reforms. To a certain extent, 'implanting the seeds of change' might even find itself in danger of the *passé* forces, which in most of the cases turn out to be more powerful in Armenian context, and thus 'die out'. As it has been proved it is far easier to change institutions and structures than it is to change patterns of thought and behaviour, ingrained over previous decades (Jones, 2000).

2.7.2 Perceptions of the teachers about the educational policy diffusion and transfer

Regarding research question two, *how do teachers in the Armenian higher education perceive the quality of the implementation processes of current reforms?*, we found that teacher compliance with or resistance to reform demands has a dynamic and vital impact on reform outcomes. Whether teachers are supportive of reforms or not mainly depends on their change knowledge, *the meaning* and *the process* of change (Fullan, 2007). The answers to the question about the meaning of reforms lay bare the fact that teachers perceive the changes as only structural ones and superficial:

This approach turns the classical education we had into a superficial one. Reducing contact hours results in neglecting some important subjects. Besides, it overestimates student-centered teaching and learning. (SU:10)

The logic and essence is distorted during implementation in Armenian reality. Moreover, the structure is overemphasised over content. (LU:19)

The responses explicate that the teachers do not have deeper understanding of the values that the reform proposes that is why their longing to preserve the good Soviet practices prevails:

Reforms should be implemented taking into consideration the good Soviet experience. (EU:23)

Traditions are neglected, the fundamentals of the good Soviet education are destroyed. (EU:46)

What actually happens at implementation level in Armenia is lack of knowledge and understanding of the reform meaning and process. Mostly the teachers in the sample reported on their lack of knowledge about *the change process* and refused to answer the two questions about the meaning and process of the reforms.

I have difficulty in answering the question because of the lack of good background knowledge about the system. (LU:7)

I have absolutely no idea of what it is about. (MU:10)

Teachers are not ready to face the challenge. We are not involved in the process since we are not informed enough. There is no motivation. (FA:9)

With regards to the ownership of the reforms 42.5% of teachers stated having lack of appropriate background for reform implementation. Desperate by the extant confusion and lack of vision, lack of appropriate directives and guidance the latter become counterproductive of the reforms thus relinquishing the virtuous mission of holding ownership. This makes the gaps between different stakeholders even wider and becomes an impediment in the reform process:

I have no clear picture of what the reform is about therefore, I have difficulties to answer the question. What is going on up there is not clear. Contribution is not possible if you do not know what, how and where to contribute. No, I cannot say the reform is for me. (LU:07)

Consequently, the dramatic realities throughout the whole travel route of reforms result in ambiguity and therefore resistance on the teachers' part, which are to be seen "not just as obstacles to change, but as sources of wisdom and learning that can inform it" (Hargreaves, 2007, 226).

Mostly teachers resist the change because of the deeply-rooted beliefs and mentality mismatch. On top of that, the mode in which the reform is implemented deepens the opposition and resistance on our part. (PU:9)

Therefore, the message the teachers try to convey through resistance is unless the implementation modes are changed little support can be expected on their part.

Further, the responses explicate that the role of the teachers in the process is underestimated and no consideration is taken of their *agency* while implementing the reforms. Apart from the lack of necessary background, the teachers also complained of the poor state of resources, poor salary, lack of involvement in the decision-making process, and prevailing corruption as major impediments for reform implementation:

The low salary of the teaching staff inhibits the objective assessment of students, which actually makes corruption flourish. (PU:7)

As the data reveal, there is explicit underestimation and insufficient appreciation of the teaching staff, which actually brings about demotivation of the latter and may result in an abuse of the professional authority for personal as well as material gain (Heyneman, 2004).

2.7.3 The nature of reform implementation

For answering research question three, *how to understand the nature of the reform implementation processes against the background of theories about successful education change?*, an integrative approach of both the methods, document analyses and survey, was used to depict an explicit picture of the quality of reform implementation in the Armenian higher education. With regards to the quality of reform implementation, as Bache and Taylor (2003) propose it, the strong reaction to external pressures in the form of *resistance* and *conceptual adaptation* in most cases, are explicit in the Armenian case. First, a strong resistance in the form of a salient immunity to new ideas and concepts was explicit because of the lack of reception of new ideas. The reason for resistance was to protect the values established throughout the decades, and the reaction was quite natural with the level of the change awareness the teachers had. As some of the teachers put it:

The reforms turn the classical education we had into a superficial one. Western mentality and educational system negatively impact on still forming mentality of our youth. There is strong decrease of moral and educational criteria and standards. The programs proposed through reforms do not comply with the Armenian market. (SU:25)

What reform brings about is narrowing down the scope of knowledge, disregarding the literature, the values our Soviet education promoted. (FA:7)

Reforms should be implemented taking into account the good Soviet practice. National traditions are neglected albeit the education is considered to be for the Armenians. There are great Soviet methods, which should be preserved. (EU:18)

The tacit implication behind the resistance is stressing out the values the Soviet 'classical' education provided and the supposition that the Soviet education system was the best and should be the only one to be followed if the achievements are to be preserved. 24.4% of responses stressed out that the reforms undertaken, actually, negatively impact the Armenian education system and, therefore, expressed their lack of trust in the reforms. What the teachers neglect in this particular case is the change of the paradigm, market demands, the globalisation trends and ultimately, the evolution of the system.

Next, *conceptual adaptation* of ideas is revealed through the fact that the universities in target started to superficially adapt policies without prior agreement to or consideration of the role of teachers' agency. However, as opposed to Bache and Taylor's argument (2003), the 'virus effect', during which new ways of acting are moved to the level of discourse, did not take place in Armenian reality, at least not until now. What actually happened here was further isolation of the teachers and therefore, deepening the superficiality of approaches.

Most teachers demonstrate a superficial approach towards reform implementation and do it because they are imposed to and for the sake of check out. (SU:22)

What creates problems is superficiality of approaches on the part of administration while implementing reforms. The inadequate level of knowledge about the reforms they have causes distortion of reforms. They never take any follow-up steps. Besides, the pace of reforms is too fast for such radical reforms. Everything is done for the sake of reporting results. There is a huge imbalance between the documental and actual work done. People need time to digest. (PU:8)

With regards to the implementation route undertaken it is mainly in a top-down direction. This becomes explicit since mostly teachers had difficulties in answering the question about the meaning of reforms. Moreover, in the reform process part they reported their being non-informed of the process at all and mainly stated their being isolated from the process and being merely imposed to implement new approaches:

We lack appropriate background knowledge for reform implementation. We may have some theoretical knowledge about reforms, but how to put it into practice is still a mystery for us. (PU:15)

There is no strategic planning for reform implementation. Everything takes place on ad-hoc basis, and hardly are our opinions considered. (MU:17)

As for the types of changes undertaken both the documents analysed and the teacher responses explicate prevalence of *first-order* changes. In the *Law on Higher and Post-Graduate Professional Education (2004)*, out of the 13 points promoting Bologna principles none actually considers changes in behaviour:

- Adoption and development of two degree levels (Bachelor's - 4 year
- and Master's - 2 year degrees) and support to transformation of
- existed five year programs to undergraduate and graduate;

- Establishment of a platform for recognition of Armenian HE degrees and cycles by EHEA, facilitation of the mutual recognition of qualifications;
- Development of standards in HE aligning to international ones;
- Promotion of a system of credits (such as ECTS);
- Establishment of a national ECTS office to develop guidelines on credit transfer system;
- Establishment of a national office for foreign degrees recognition;
- Promotion of Armenian involvement into ENIC and NARIC network and implementation of Lisbon convention statements;
- Harmonization of Armenian Diploma Supplement to European standards;
- Development of a student scholarship system;
- Establishment of the links between HE sector and labour market;
- Development of quality assurance mechanisms;
- Improvement of the HE sector efficiency;
- Establishment career centers at universities. (p. 7)

However, even when implementing first-order changes, apathetic attitude towards the reform implementation surfaces, since “change which is not internalized is likely to be cosmetic, ‘token’ and temporary” (Day, 1999, 98). One example is the revision of the curricula, which dates to the Soviet times and undermines the principles set forth by and necessary for competence-based curricula. In response to the call for moving onto a two-tier system, which along with structural changes also implied changes in the content, most universities found a way out by just reducing contact hours and allocating credits to the existing courses. More theoretical courses were moved to the Master’s level. What actually happened here is extending the previous five-year programmes into six and splitting it into bachelor and master levels (4+2), instead of developing new competence-based curricula for both the levels:

I think the 4+2 system is too long of a period for learning, besides, the programmes we have do not correspond to international standards; they are just artificially prolonged.

Decrease in teaching hours, problems with new assessment, lack of adequate resources, they all cause frustration. How can I fit the material I taught in 32 hours into 16 hours? There must be other ways of treating the problem, the ways we do not know. Besides, neglecting oral exams and promoting tests reduces the level of our graduates. (MU:17)

As a result, the universities found themselves in a situation in which they tended more to adapt and adjust innovative approaches to existing Soviet materials (Kozma and Polonyi, 2004), thus distorting both, rather than making deep and meaningful changes crucial to the success of the reform.

2.8 Conclusions and discussion

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and quality of the current reforms in Armenian higher education against the background of adopting the West-European Bologna principles. The underlying reason for the inquiry is that despite the positive attitude to adopt the reforms, the implementation processes turned out to be rather complex. Based on the recent policy and innovation literature, this process of policy diffusion and transfer was explored by exploring the dialogue among change owners necessary to implement reforms successfully and the required change knowledge that determine the dialogue. The study also aimed to combine concepts of policy and innovation literature.

While examining the *characteristic features of the higher education reforms* undertaken by the Armenian policymakers, a particular attention was paid to the policy diffusion and transfer modes as well as the extent to which the stakeholders were involved in the change process. The results show that the changes are mainly vertical, carried out by conceptual adaptation and there is strong resistance on the part of the actual implementers, who try to preserve the good practices they had during the Soviet times. Having deprived the teachers of the values they had cherished for so many years, the new system failed to substitute it with the

valid ones to raise their trust. On the other hand, the elements of direct and indirect coercive transfer methods are also explicit. Coupled together they make the prevalence of a top-down approach even stronger.

Both the documents reviewed and the answers to the two open-ended questions reveal the major areas within and between which the problems occur. First of all, the policy transfer driven by the globalisation trends did not find a favourable environment to prosper, because all the policymakers were concerned about was adapting the policies to meet the global pressures without taking any real steps to deeply discern the meaning and process of change and successfully convey the values to the actual implementers. Next, the existing gaps between the four groups of stakeholders brought about alienation of the teachers and therefore, their relinquishing the role of owners and bearers of change. As Bache and Taylor (2003) put it, even if the national goals open up prospects for success, the environment with prevailing policies, processes and people involved in the process still causes constraints.

With regards to *the teachers' perception of the quality of the implementation processes of current reforms*, the results reveal the upheaval of higher education teachers, teacher deprivation of the involvement in the change process, which compel the latter to find a panacea in keeping to the practices they are used to. Moreover, the lack of change knowledge causes distrust and uncertainty and results in nostalgia towards the 'good, old Soviet times'. Coupled with the lack of change knowledge is the lack of resources and a poor socio-economic status they are holding, which actually forces them to combine two or more positions for survival or rather, leave the position. As a result, the teachers go on 'functioning in their own niches' behaving the way they feel comfortable with. Consequently, one of the fundamental things lacking in the current reforms in Armenia is an in-depth understanding of teachers' cognitions about the proposed changes, which is one of the key factors for successful implementation (Little, 1996). The results also explicate teachers do have a lot to contribute to the process; what hinders is the underestimation of teacher capacity and insufficient appreciation

of their active involvement in designing and implementing reforms. Yet, another remarkable finding that needs further exploration is the causal attributions on the part of the teachers. The latter mainly tend to attribute the negative outcomes of the reform to the factors that are beyond their locus of control.

So, what is *the quality of the reform implementation processes against the background of the theories about successful education change*? To answer the third research question a comparison of the schema depicting an ideal framework for change initiation as well as a descriptive schema representing the case of Armenia is conducted (Figure 2.2).

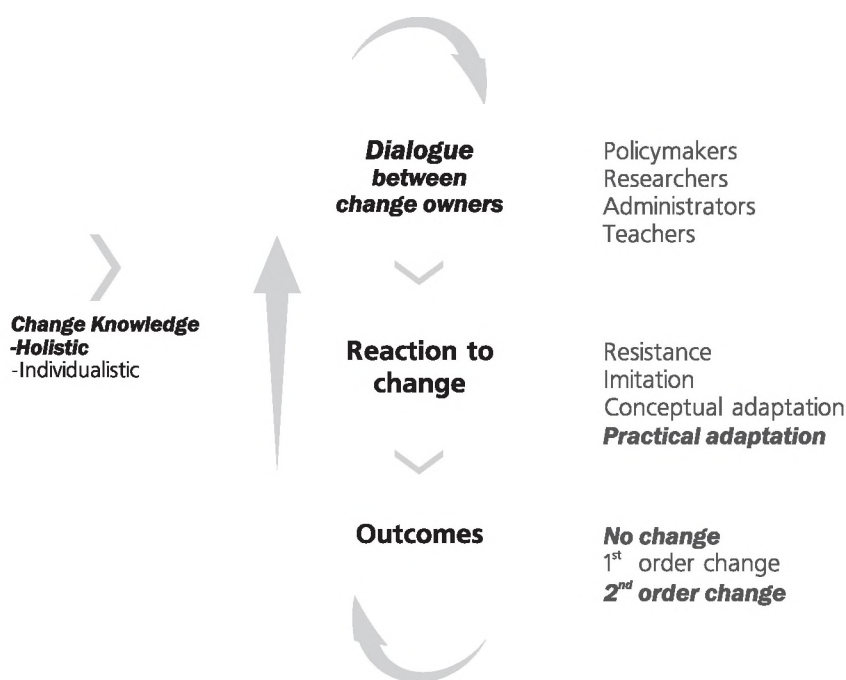


Figure 2.2: A comparison of the ideal framework of implementation and the Armenian case (in bold and italic the elements that are absent in the Armenian case are indicated).

The following components lack in the descriptive framework: the change knowledge, a holistic approach to reform implementation, a dialogue between the stakeholders, practical adaptation, second-order changes. Actually, the types of changes undertaken are mainly in a top-down way and are first-order changes targeting restructuring of the system. At the policy level policy diffusion and transfer takes place in isolation from the actual implementers, which implies opposition of the latter because of the imposition of changes, which are not internalised. What actually lacks is the main driving force of reforms, the change knowledge, the existence of which means a meaningful facilitation of the process. Next component lacking in the descriptive framework is the dialogue between the stakeholders. This means an attempt to join efforts in learning in the context of change actually has not been made.

What is at the heart of the pitfalls, as Fullan states, is underestimation of the change knowledge in the change process. The core concept of change process lacking any kind of attention in the documents analysed and teachers' responses is significance of *learning* in context and *change knowledge*. The changes envisioned by the Armenian policymakers are of high importance, but as Fullan demonstrated above, without change knowledge and the key eight drivers all the endeavours are deemed to failure. Along with professional development, special emphasis on creating enough incentives for the teachers to 'learn in context' is essential for success. With the aim to make quick changes geared towards recognition at international level the policymakers oversaw the cruciality of deeper learning in the context intended for change and building on the necessary capacity for change.

With regards to the types of change in policymakers' agendas there is prevalence of first-order changes and underestimation of the second-order ones. However, even the first-order changes undertaken have turned out to be a failure because of the attitude of the administration, which, striving to preserve their positions and authority, made superficial changes for the sake of a report to the governing bodies. One of the consequences observed is the administrators' acting for

the sake of 'check out', which resulted in teachers' frustration, alienation and, therefore, superficial changes and distortions.

Further, a lacking component is teacher ownership of the process. While the Armenian government and the higher education institutions are to change their policies and approaches and act in ways that enable implementers to make necessary changes, it is teachers who are direct agents and arbiters of what gets taught and how. Holding ownership of a change process requires consistency between teacher perceptions and the actual reforms. In order to achieve harmony, a definite restructuring of teacher cognition and psychology, making sense of the innovations, and therefore reconsidering approaches to teaching and learning are essential (Spillane *et al.*, 2002; van den Berg, 2002; Day *et al.* 2006). This is only possible in the case of sound persuasive motives in the benefit of reforms on the part of policymakers. Unless all the stakeholders involved in the change process hold ownership of the reforms, the reform is unlikely to succeed. And the success can be achieved only by instilling enough incentives for the stakeholders to learn in context. The elements missing in the change process actually make practical adaptation of reforms and second order changes impossible.

The implication of the inquiry is useful for improving the practice of policy diffusion, transfer, and implementation of both Bologna and similar type of reforms in a post-Soviet country. The lessons learnt can be applicable in the case of developing countries and even developed ones in the sense that the major lines, such as diffusion and transfer of a policy from a developed country into a developing one, the teachers' role, the role of culture and environment, the sense-making of reforms, the attitude of the stakeholders towards the process itself as well as knowledge about change play a crucial role in the success of any change endeavour.

Ultimately, the analyses make it absolutely clear that a change process is, by no means, a quick fix; rather it is a hard task, which demands joint efforts of stakeholders, time, resources and last, but not least, trust in the value of the

change. If teachers are the core actors of education reforms it is reasonable to further discern deep inside multiple components of their cognition within the context of current higher education reforms. This will hopefully reveal the message behind their attitude, and the ways through which the reform implementation may be modified to serve their needs. Such kind of approach might be helpful in designing more persuasive and feasible policies to educational change and implementation.

- **Perceptions of University Teachers about the Higher Education Reforms in Armenia**

CHAPTER

3



• **Perceptions of University Teachers about the Higher Education Reforms in Armenia**

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of the university teachers regarding the reforms implementation in the Armenian higher education. A questionnaire study with the participation of 279 university teachers shows how eight leading higher education institutions have adapted to the political directive to create alignment with the Bologna principles. The diffusion of West European policies is evaluated in light of the literature on educational change as well as the perceptions of those who actually implement the reforms, the university teachers. The findings reveal the peculiarities of the reform implementation in a post-Soviet country and the urgency of revising the approaches to reform implementation if success of the reforms is to be achieved.

Chapter Three

3

A previous version of this chapter was presented at the annual conference of *the American Educational Research Association* (2010, Denver, Colorado). A new version of this chapter has been submitted as: Karakhanyan, S., van Veen, K., Bergen, T., "Perceptions of University Teachers about the Higher Education Reforms in Armenia" to *European Education*.

3.1 Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a completely new paradigm of educational transformation emerged in the Republic of Armenia (RA) more as a reaction to the totalitarian past rather than being based on any kind of empirical research (Anweiler, 1992). The transitional period in Armenia was especially painful because of the political turbulence, economic difficulties, social inequalities and non-stability of the government.

The actual reform in Armenia started in the early 1990s by the top management of some leading universities, and the first steps were undertaken through pilot projects by introducing a two-tier degree structure, curricula changes and new assessment systems. In some cases, these change activities were supported by international projects like Tempus, Open Society Institute, US Department of State and Education to name but a few. However, lack of the clear vision of educational reforms (Zelvys, 2004) coupled with insufficient necessary administrative capacity in change management and the uncertainty caused by the passive attitude of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) at the start of the reforms resulted in most of the cases in ambiguity of what should be done, in which sequence, how and why. Consequently, the entire complex process of educational change was reduced to mere technical conversions resulting in no change in either the content or behaviour in the desired direction.

Being aware of the drawbacks of the educational system the Armenian Government took steps to harmonize the architecture of the educational system with the current requirements. A priority has been integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through joining the Bologna Declaration in May 2005. As a result, a three-tier system, European Credit Transfer System and diploma supplement were introduced and became obligatory for all the universities beginning the academic year 2006-2007 (MoES decree of December 14, 2004). The undertaken reforms in higher and postgraduate professional education are three-fold aimed at the education structure, content and management. Innovative methods of teaching, management and organisation have become topical. Currently, among the priorities on the agenda of the RA government are de-

velopment of a national qualifications framework and quality assurance system comparable with the European standards.

The changes in Armenian higher education lay bare the problems peculiar to the higher education systems with a strong Soviet legacy (Gvaramadze, 2010). The issues evolve around the management styles, teaching and learning approaches, curriculum, human resources, organisational culture. Coupled with the latter are the tough economic situation, prevailing corruption, and the meager salary the teachers are entitled to. It is in this complex environment that the academics find themselves and it is this increased uncertainty that makes effective reforms something beyond the vision of many.

In fact, the reforms in the Armenian higher education can be characterised as 'top-down' and 'first-order'. It is top-down, since the policies transferred from Western Europe have found little appreciation and support on the part of the higher education teachers. It is first-order, since the changes are addressed to more superficial elements of the classroom and the university system and do not stress the organisation to any meaningful degree (Karakhanyan, *et al.*, 2011). However, many of the changes required by current societal and educational demands go deeper than any surface treatment can address, and require what Cuban (1988) calls 'second-order changes' – changes that go deeper into the structure of organisations and the ways in which people work together. This kind of change is multifaceted, slower, and means changing attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, relationships, and the way people collaborate. Such an approach seems to be largely missing in the Armenian context, which actually makes the quality of undertakings and, therefore, achievement of the reform aims questionable. To add up, while implementing the reforms, still hardly any attention is being paid to the perceptions of the ones assumed to implement at the local level, namely university teachers (Karakhanyan, *et al.*, 2011).

The case of Armenia provides a rich context for exploring the notions about reform implementation strategies in a post-Soviet country since throughout the last two decades the higher education in Armenia has been a subject to reforms based on the western practices. Yet, as Hargreaves (1994) cautions, transfer of

reforms from Anglophone and Anglo-centric traditions to developing countries can often bring about damaging results since such factors as scarcity of public funding and bureaucratic control over curriculum and assessment are still in force. Higher education in Armenia seems to be such a case. Exploring teachers' perceptions in the Armenian case, which is so different from western educational contexts potentially enables another or new understanding of successful implementation strategies (cf. Hativa and Goodyear, 2002; Hargreaves, 2005).

In order to contribute to a deeper understanding of how university teachers make sense of the higher education reforms in the context of a post-Soviet country, this study will unfold taking several concepts exploring teachers' perceptions into account.

3.2 Theoretical framework

In educational research, there is a lot of tension about teachers' perceptions of reforms (Spillane *et al*, 2002; Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005; Hargreaves, 2005; Fullan, 2007). Concepts such as beliefs, change knowledge, organisational knowledge, emotions refer to how teachers perceive, experience, and react to changes. As Miltenburg & Singer (1999) argue, such cognitive – affective processes refer to “complex synthesising structures integrating cognition (in the form of appraisals, expectations, and beliefs) with motivation (in the form of needs, interests, goals, action tendencies), affect (in the shape of physiological arousal and sensory and bodily feeling) and actions (in the form of motor responses and procedures and methods for acting)” (p. 6). Therefore, this study concentrates on a conceptual framework, which combines both cognitive and behavioural concepts exploring teachers' perceptions: (1) change knowledge, (2) organisational culture, (3) beliefs about changes, (4) emotions about changes, and (5) causal attribution. Taken together, these concepts constitute a meaningful framework for deeper understanding of university teachers' perceptions in the context of educational changes.

3.2.1 *Change knowledge*

This study takes change knowledge as the central concept for exploring teachers' perceptions. The assumption is only through change knowledge ensuring deep understanding of the underlying processes of change can teachers appreciate and follow the changes. As Fullan (2004) argues, a missing ingredient in most educational changes is insufficient appreciation and use of change knowledge. Fullan defines change knowledge as understanding and insight about the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice, the presence of which does not guarantee success, but its absence ensures failure. Fullan (2007) proposes to consider change from two perspectives – *the meaning of change* and *the process of change*. The crux of change, as he states, is how individuals come to grips with this reality since underestimation of either the meaning or process of change eventually results in dilemmas in most of the cases. Considering change knowledge the driving force of reforms puts its importance at the heart of any change process, since it provides for a deeper understanding of the concepts, underlying processes, and the values it bears. Moreover, it facilitates the change process without which incoherencies and misunderstandings are unavoidable.

Further, for a change to be successful, Fullan (2004) calls for a holistic approach to change through inquiries into the system *per se*. The single guideline he provides is that in order to change individuals and systems simultaneously, more 'learning in context' must be provided for, that is, learning in the actual situations to be changed. Deep change knowledge ensures a new approach to reform implementation, which is cyclical and builds each new cycle on the knowledge and experience acquired in the previous ones (Fullan and Scott, 2009).

Such an integrative perspective on the system change makes change knowledge an even more crucial concept to be considered in the analysis of the case of a post-Soviet country where the issue of a system and individual change is at stake.

3.2.2 Organisational culture

To deeper understand why the teachers behave the way they do it is imperative to first of all understand the culture in which they function and the extent to which it is conducive to changing, learning and creating. Schein defines (1997) culture as a phenomenon that surrounds all of us, helps to understand how it is created, embedded, developed, manipulated, managed, and changed. Many leading scholars on school improvement have emphasised tight relationships between organisational culture and changes (Hargreaves, 1994; Schein, 1997; Hopkins, 2001). Hargreaves (1994) and Fullan (1996a, 2007) emphasise the role of *re-culturing* and *restructuring* in the success of reforms since they imply change in the teachers' beliefs, habits, norms and values. For a systemic reform, Fullan (1996a) underpins *re-culturing*, which also involves new conceptions about instructions and new forms of professionalism. In this study, organisational culture is considered as an important component holding the clue to educational improvement and the process of institutional change. Therefore, to determine the extent to which the culture is conducive to change, the content of culture will be viewed through the behavioural regularities, norms, values and beliefs of the teachers at a given organisation.

3.2.3 Beliefs about changes

Teachers' beliefs can be viewed as lenses through which teachers actually perceive the reforms and they have a dynamic impact on their decision-making and behaviour. A range of researchers have documented a strong relationship between the beliefs about teaching and learning and practice of teachers (Prosser & Trigwell, 1997; Archer, 1999; Dart *et al.*, 2000). Some researchers define teachers' beliefs as a framework that organises meaning and informs practices (Clark and Peterson, 1986), or influences teachers' decision-making, and in some cases, effectiveness (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Teachers' approach to teaching, as Kember and Kwan (2000) state, might reflect the teaching behaviour that the teacher finds the most congenial, in which case it is likely to be aligned with the teachers' beliefs about teaching. On the other hand, as Martin

et al. (2000) put it, an approach to teaching might reflect the behaviour the teachers are imposed to adopt by curriculum or by the organisational culture. In either case, each approach is directly manifested through teachers' behaviour in the classroom. The same refers to teachers' beliefs about reforms. The university teachers believing in reform necessity have sufficient motivation to change their daily practices and tryout different approaches to succeed. Alternatively, teachers lacking belief in a reform necessity preserve their usual practices or adapt the new approaches to their existing ones, thus, causing distortion.

In this study teachers' beliefs about changes are seen from two perspectives, beliefs about reforms and beliefs about teaching and learning. Such an approach is supposed to reveal both the impact of a Western reform transfer on a post-Soviet culture and the extent to which teachers internalise the new trends in teaching and learning.

3.2.4 Emotions

To explore teachers' perceptions in isolation from the emotions it entails is to run a risk of overlooking this particularly emotion-laden aspect. Teachers' emotions are rooted in cognitions and it is impossible to separate feelings from perceptions, affectivity from judgement (Nias, 1996). While examining emotional sufferings and freedom, Zembylas (2005) elaborates on successes and failures of particular regimes within an organisational culture. He proposes that emotional navigations and the coping strategies actually reveal an interesting micro-political perspective. Van Veen *et al.*'s (2005) research shows how the enthusiasm of reform activists may decline when local definitions and conditions of reform create conflicts and overwork.

Another emotional and cognitive dimension influencing teachers' perceptions and behaviour is nostalgia concerning the past experiences (Goodson, *et al.*, 2006), which influences their behaviour in a certain way. Ownership is still another emotional expression, which plays a central role in change process (Hargreaves, 1994). This study delves into the aspects of emotions which mostly deal with (1) nostalgia for the 'good Soviet times' since the university teachers

mainly have a rich Soviet history, (2) their emotions within the reforms diffused from the West, and (3) the extent of ownership they hold for the reforms on the government agenda. Understanding what the teachers' drivers for change and preservation are, as Hargreaves argues, will reveal valuable insights about how change can be made most effectively.

3.2.5 Causal attribution

In this study Weiner's *Attribution Theory* (1992; 2000) will be applied as a lens for understanding university teachers' behaviour. To explain everyday actions, people search for reasons, which are associated with desires, incentives, volitional choice and free will (Weiner, 2008). Weiner uses attributions for eliciting the causes of success and failure. According to him, the most important factors affecting attributions are ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. The basic principle of attribution theory with regards to motivation is that a person's own perceptions or attributions for success and failure determine the amount of effort the person will expend on that activity in the future. The theory emphasises the idea that agents are strongly motivated by the pleasant outcome of being able to feel good about themselves. An important assumption of the theory is that people will interpret their environment in such a way so as to maintain a positive self-image (Weiner, 1992, 2000).

Research has documented three underlying causal properties: (1) the location of cause, which is either within or outside of the actor; (2) causal stability or the duration of cause (stable causes – aptitude; unstable – chance); and (3) controllability refers to volitional alterations, such as causes like effort. Anyhow, as Weiner (1992) argues, some causes cannot be willfully changed and luck and aptitude have this property. Overall, attributional analysis provides a window for understanding of evaluation, reactions to the stigmatised, help, and aggression. In our context an attempt has been made to understand the teachers' behaviour through attributional analysis since it is believed to reveal the spheres in which change policies are incongruent with the teachers' perceptions.

3.2.6 An analytic framework as a tool for analysing changes

To begin with, for a deeper understanding of the steering processes underlying an educational reform it is crucial to focus on the direct implementers of change, the teachers. Next, to explain a particular behaviour of the implementer it is logical to draw on such concepts as their change knowledge, the organisational culture in which the changes unfold, their beliefs regarding the reform process in general and that of the teaching and learning practices in particular. Further, for making deeper implications emotions within the change context coupled with causal attributions of the reform implementation may shed a light on how the teachers perceive the change and what they have at stake. If integrated in an analytic framework (Figure 3.1) a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions from multiple dimensions may lead to implications about the processes underlying reforms.

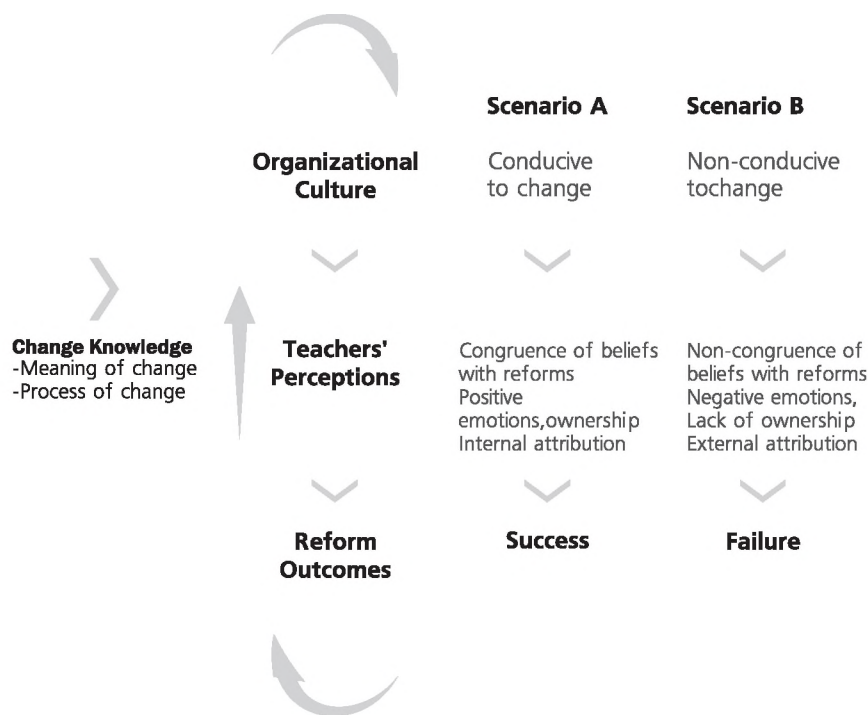


Figure 3.1: An analytic framework for teachers' perceptions analysis

What the analytic framework underpins is within a change process two extreme scenarios are possible: the assumption for Scenario A is in case of *change knowledge* existence and *cyclical approach* to learning in context while implementing reforms, the potentials for an *organisational culture* to be conducive to change become higher, which ensures *teachers' beliefs* are congruent with reform aims. In such a case *positive emotions* and *internal attribution* can be expected. Consequently, it can be implied that the teachers will feel *ownership of the process* and care about the success - a prerequisite for reform *successful* implementation. Scenario B, where *change knowledge* is lacking, may result in an *organisational*

culture not conducive to change leading to *non-congruence of teachers' beliefs* with reforms, *negative emotions* and therefore *external attribution* and *lack of ownership* – a sign of *failure*.

3.3 Research questions

In this study an attempt has been made to deeper understand the perceptions of the Armenian university teachers within the changes transferred from West Europe in the light of the outlined conceptual framework. The research questions are:

1. What is the extent of university teachers' change knowledge in Armenia?
2. What are the university teachers' beliefs and emotions about the reforms within the given organisational culture?
3. To what extent do the teachers in Armenia attribute the reform outcomes to internal and external factors?

In order to answer the research questions a questionnaire, *Teachers' Perceptions within a Change Context* that included both summated rating scales and open-ended questions was used.

3.4 Methods

3.4.1 Construction of the questionnaire

The questions in the questionnaire were based on the concepts derived from the literature and the emphasis was put on revealing teachers' perceptions regarding the reforms in the Armenian higher education. The questionnaire *Teachers' Perceptions within a Change Context* explored five concepts: (A) change knowledge, (B) beliefs about organisational culture, (C) beliefs about changes, operationalised through two subgroups: beliefs about reforms and beliefs about teaching and learning, (D) emotions about reforms and (E) causal attribution of the outcomes. This study involved a within-stage mixed-model design since it

included summated rating scales as well as two open-ended questions (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The close-ended questions were operationalised through five-point Likert scales (1- strongly agree to 5- strongly disagree) for the concepts A, B, C, and D. Two open-ended questions were added to get deeper insights into teacher change knowledge (concept A) and causal attributions (concept E). Each of the variables consisted of a group of items to measure different aspects of the same variable. Overall, the questionnaire consisted of 79 items: 9 demographic questions, 3 questions with categorical values, 2 open-ended questions and 67 close-ended questions. The whole questionnaire took 20-25 minutes to be completed.

3.4.2 Pilot

The questionnaire was piloted with a small group of teachers from three different universities. 16 teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire. Piloting the questionnaire contributed to its further redevelopment referring to two main issues regarding the structure and content.

First, the structure of the questionnaire was changed. In the original version there was a clear division between student-centred and teacher-centred approaches, which, in a normative way, directed the teachers in the pilot to guess the desired response. Therefore, the two sub-sections were integrated into one and the scale was renamed into *Beliefs about Teaching and Learning*. Next, the five-point Likert scales had a reverse order for each sub-section; however, this had to be changed since most of the teachers complained of wasting much time on following the order of each sub-section.

With regards to the content, there were mainly problems with the Armenian equivalents of terms, which were explicated. Further, the two items (Q23 and Q24 about teaching approaches) with categorical values were split into three focusing more on what teaching and learning method the teachers considered to be the most reasonable and what approaches they actually used.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 77 items. The distribution

was as follows: 9 questions addressing teacher demographic status; 10 items – change knowledge (including 2 open-ended questions); 11 items – organisational culture; 11 items addressing beliefs about reforms; 25 items – beliefs about teaching and learning; 11 items – emotions about reforms. Two open-ended questions explored the teachers' change knowledge and causal attribution of the outcomes.

3.4.3 The survey study

3.4.3.1 Sample demographics

The emphasis was given to the key universities that have undergone changes based on the western practices since the 1990s and have complied with some elements of the Bologna process. The approximate number of university teachers at the eight universities in the sample comes to 3000. The random sampling targeted 300 teachers, 10% of the overall population, and this provides for a background to state that the sample is representative of the population.

3.4.3.2 Response and data collection

In January - February 2008, 300 teachers were approached to participate in the study and 93% (279 teachers) responded. 188 teachers (70%) provided answers to the two open-ended questions. 50 % provided their names and contact information for further inquiries. The underlying principle for filling in the questionnaire was voluntarism. The high percentage of responses actually attests that teachers do care about the quality of the educational reforms.

The sex distribution of the sample was 45.3% males and 54.7% females. The age groupings and distribution of the sample by the positions was as follows

Table 3.1: Age * Position Cross-tabulation

Age group	Full professors	Associate professors	Assistant professors	Teachers (no research background)	Total for the Age Group
21-30	0	0	1	36	37
31-40	1	2	12	31	46
41-50	5	10	22	28	65
51-60	2	21	27	22	72
61-70	8	9	10	5	32
71-80	3	3	4	2	12
Total for the Positions	19	45	76	124	264
Missing value	15				

3.5 Analysis

The analysis of the data unfolded in four successive steps presented below.

3.5.1 Close-ended questions

The first step in the analysis of the data was missing value analysis. With the aim to control for the non-response, missing value variables analysis was conducted by using EM algorithm. The results revealed that missing values counted for less than 1% in total. Little's *MCAR* test showed the *Chi-Square* to be 2448.499; *DF* (degree of freedom) = 2428 with *Sig.* = .381. Considering the fact that no systematic missing pattern was encountered, it is argued that the missing values were completely at random. Therefore, with the help of the programme they were counted for.

The second step involved a reliability test (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Structure of the questionnaire

Scales	Sample Question	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Teacher Change Knowledge	I constantly build on my capacity (acquire new knowledge, skills and competences)	8	.79
Organisational Culture	The environment at our university is conducive to creating learning culture	11	.88
Beliefs about reforms	Good reforms promote freedom of choice	9	.82
Beliefs about Teaching and Learning	Teachers have an appropriate background to be involved in student-centred teaching and learning	21	.78
Emotions regarding reforms	I feel empowered by the new teaching methods	11	.85

The first scale, *Teachers' Change Knowledge*, consisted of 8 items exploring what the teachers' knowledge about the meaning and process of reforms is and how the teachers build on their capacity.

Within the second scale, *Organisational Culture*, the 11 items explored the perceptions of teachers about the culture prevailing at the given institutions and whether it was conducive to successful changes.

Within the third scale *Beliefs about Changes*, the first subgroup *Beliefs about reforms* looked at the teachers' beliefs about what a good reform should be like. Within this subgroup item 5 (*The Soviet education system was much better than the one proposed by the reforms*) was reversed because of the opposite

direction and items 6 (*There are substantial differences between the two systems with regards to content*) and 7 (*There are substantial differences between the two systems with regards to structure*) were deleted because of the low reliability. The second subgroup within this scale, *Beliefs about Teaching and Learning*, explored teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning practices best suitable for the Armenian reality. Two teaching and learning practices, teacher-centred and student-centred, were considered within the frames and through 22 items an attempt was made to reveal what practices were prevailing in the Armenian higher education system and what approaches were considered to be the most appropriate for the given culture. Item 30 (*I am willing to relinquish the traditional position of sole authority*) was deleted because of the low reliability.

For the scale *Emotions about Reforms*, 11 items explored how the teachers felt within the change process and whether or not the reforms responded to their needs. Within the scale two items were reversed: item 57 (*I feel disappointed with the constraints reform puts over my work*) and item 58 (*I feel disappointed with reform implementation*).

This step culminated in descriptive statistics and frequency analysis (see the Results section).

3.5.2 Open-ended questions

The third step in the analysis involved the two open-ended questions. Items 59 (*What is the meaning of the Bologna reforms? List at least three*) and 60 (*What is the process of change like in Armenia? List at least three processes*) intended to complement the scale *Change Knowledge*. First of all, the issue of coding the open-ended responses was addressed. For the first question, the codes were grouped into 6 code families and, afterwards, 4 categories. The same procedure was followed for the second question and, 12 code families were grouped into 4 main categories. The data were analysed using descriptive and frequency statistics. To provide for the validity of the codes and categories peer debriefing of the results was conducted.

In total, 70% (188) of teachers opted to respond to the two open-ended questions. 46.8% (88 teachers) were males and 52.1% (98 teachers) were females. 94.1%, (177 teachers out of 188) provided one or more answers to the question regarding the meaning of change, in total 490 responses. 84% (158 teachers out of 188) provided answers to the question regarding the process of change, in total 438 responses.

The fourth step involved attributional analysis. The responses to the two-open ended questions were analysed in the light of Weiner's three underlying causal properties: (1) locus (two poles: internal vs. external), (2) stability (do causes change over time or not?), and (3) controllability (causes one can control such as skills vs. causes one cannot control such as luck, others' actions).

First, the issue of re-categorising the codes was addressed. The responses in which teachers attributed causes to their lack of knowledge, information and skills were considered internal; the responses in which teachers attributed causes to students, administrators and policymakers were considered external. With regards to the causal stability, causes which had little potential for change over a short period of time such as, corruption, culture, mentality, aptitude were considered stable ones. The causes that had potential to change over a short period of time such as competency, skills and knowledge about reforms, lack of resources, flaws in implementation were considered unstable. Given that controllability refers to volitional alterations, the causes that could be tackled by the teachers in the event they had access to the resources they needed were considered controllable. Similarly, the causes that were out of the locus of the teachers' control such as behaviour of the management and policymakers, lack of capacity on the part of their colleagues and students to engage in the change process, corruption, and peculiar mentality were considered uncontrollable. Overall, eight combinations with the three properties surfaced: (1) internal controllable, (2) external controllable, (3) internal non-controllable, (4) external non-controllable, (5) internal stable, (6) external stable, (7) internal unstable, (8) external unstable (Table 7).

To ensure reliability of the coding system both intra- and inter-rater reliability tests

were conducted using SPSS. The intra-rater reliability, conducted in a three-week time span, was .96 (Cohen's kappa). Regarding the inter-rater reliability, another researcher coded a selection of 95 responses, which resulted in an inter-rater reliability of .82 (Cohen's kappa). A few disagreements were found, which could be explained mainly by a difference in the higher education system and culture in Armenia.

3.6 Results

3.6.1 Change knowledge

3.6.1.1 Close-ended questions

To answer the first research question, *what is the extent of university teachers' change knowledge?*, two sources, the close-ended questions and open-ended questions exploring teachers' understanding of the *meaning* and *process of change* were explored. The mean score for the scale ($M = 2.08$, $SD = .48$) reveals the high self-esteem of the teachers and their confidence in their constant capacity building. In total 97.5% (272 teachers) agreed with the statements regarding their high capacity to be engaged in the change process and their readiness to constantly build on their capacity.

3.6.1.2 Open-ended questions

However, the two open-ended questions revealed teachers' lack of directions and change knowledge to implement reforms. The second open-ended question, (item 60: *What is the change process like in Armenia? List at least three processes*), was broken up into 4 categories, revealing teachers' perceptions about the change process. The distribution of frequencies is presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: The process of change

Category	Code Family	Number of responses	
Lack of appropriate background for reform successful implementation	Lack of appropriate background for reform implementation	76	
	Lack of appropriate information about reforms	25	
	Prevailing corruption	19	
	Lack of teacher motivation	19	
	Inefficiency of secondary school	17	
	Lack of student motivation	14	
	Mentality mismatch	9	
	Lack of appropriate legal background	7	
		186	42.5%
Flaws in reform implementation	<i>Implementation flaws</i>	83	
	Curricula inefficiency	36	
		119	27.2%
Negative impact of reforms	Negative impact of the reforms on Armenian education system	59	
	Lack of trust in reforms	48	
		107	24.4%
Have difficulty to answer the question		26	5.9%
Total		438	100 %

While mentioning the underlying processes, 186 responses stated lack of appropriate background for reform successful implementation. Within this category 76 responses were concerns about the lack of the appropriate background, 25 responses regarded the lack of awareness about reforms; the sources of information mentioned were mainly ad-hoc meetings at the chair level and word of mouth:

There is lack of information, guidance on reform, clear picture of the reform aims. Unfortunately, I am not informed enough of the reforms. I would propose open introduction of the reforms at universities not only for teachers but also for students and see their feedback. So far, we have been informed about reforms superficially at the chair level and just the word of mouth. (MU:11)

To a lesser extent, prevailing corruption and social capital as factors impeding reform implementation were mentioned (19 responses). Another 19 responses were about the lack of appropriate background and motivation on the part of teachers to get involved in the reform process in general and student-centred teaching and learning in particular:

Most teachers are not ready to face the challenge. (SU:15)

Further, the issues raised (14 responses) included lack of appropriate background and motivation on the part of students to get involved in student-centred education:

While implementing reforms our culture should be taken into account. I had training in the USA and tried to apply student-centred methods in my class. Mainly students are not ready for that since they are used to lecturing and do not want to take the initiative for their education into their hands. (SU:29)

In the second category 119 responses were concerns about implementation flaws, such as lack of clear policy directives, fast-pace of reforms, and non-gradual character, neglecting the good Soviet practice, superficiality of approaches, and distorted outcomes:

The logic and essence of Western reforms are distorted during implementation in the Armenian reality, besides, the fast and non-gradual pace of implementation results only in superficiality of approaches. (LU:19)

It is necessary for the Bologna signatory states to clearly state the envisioned educational system towards which the participatory countries should strive. Otherwise, the results will be non-coherent. That is, it is necessary to follow the standardized system like the Soviet practice offered. (EU:16)

Out of 119 teachers, 36 expressed concerns about curricula inefficiency.

This approach turns the classical education we had into a superficial one. Reducing contact hours results in neglecting some important subjects. Besides, it overestimates student-centred teaching and learning. (SU:10)

Within the third category 107 responses referred to concerns about the negative impact of the reforms on the existing educational system.

Western mentality and educational system negatively impact on still forming mentality of our youth. There is strong decrease of moral and educational criteria and standards. Besides, the programmes proposed through reforms do not comply with the Armenian market. (SU:25)

More specifically, out of 107 teachers, 48 expressed their distrust in the reforms:

The Western influence brings about strong decrease of moral and educational criteria and standards as well as national values we have cherished for so many years. (LU:06)

The fourth category (26 responses) reflected the statements about difficulties in answering the question because of a poor background about the changes undertaken:

I have difficulty in answering the question because of a lack of a good background regarding the system. (SU:03)

The second open-ended question, (item 59: What is the meaning of change? List at least three aims), was supposed to reveal the extent to which the teachers are informed about the meaning of change. The categories identified for the answers to the question are presented in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: The meaning of change

Category	Number of responses
Promoting quality education	233
Integration into EHEA through compliance with Bologna principles	150
Improving society through improving educational system and thus learning of all citizens	79
Have no idea what the reform is about	28

The answers to the first open-ended question reveal 233 of the responses were about promoting quality of education through changes in curricula, assessment methods, teaching and learning practices. Next, 150 responses were about integration into the EHEA through following the Bologna principles. To a lesser extent (79 responses), improving society through improving educational system and thus learning of all citizens was mentioned. 28 responses were mere statements about the absence of any idea of what reform is about because of the lack of the appropriate background:

I have difficulty in answering this question since I have no idea. (EU:23)

3.6.2 Teachers' beliefs and emotions within the organisational culture

To answer research question two, *what are the university teachers' beliefs and emotions about the reforms within the given organisational culture?*, the closed-ended questions explored university teachers' beliefs and emotions influenced by the organisational culture.

The scale *Organisational Culture* explored whether the organisations have a culture that is conducive to reform implementation. The mean of the scale ($M = 2.42$, $SD = .66$) revealed that the teachers tend to disagree with the statement. The frequency distribution revealed 77.8% (217 teachers) of the teachers found the milieu to be unfavourable for reform implementation, whereas only 22.5% (62 teachers) claimed of the appropriateness of the work environment for successful change. No statistical significance between the two gender differences was found.

Table 3.5: Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organisational culture	279	1.00	4.18	2.42	.66
Beliefs about reforms	279	1.00	4.67	2.35	.58
Beliefs about teaching and learning	279	1.36	3.41	2.36	.36
Emotions about reforms	279	1.00	4.00	2.21	.52
Valid N (listwise)	279				

*When 1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree

With regards to the teachers' *Beliefs about Reforms*, the mean for the scale ($M = 2.35$, $SD = .58$) shows that teachers tend to agree with the necessity of the current reforms. The frequency distribution revealed 86% (240 teachers) opted in favour of the current reforms; however, they also expressed a strong desire to preserve the good traditions and practices prevalent during the Soviet times. On the other hand, 14.2% (39 teachers) opted more to disagree with the statement regarding Soviet practice preservation.

With regards to the *Beliefs about Teaching and Learning*, most teachers 57.7% (161 teachers) responded in favour of the combination of lecturing, discussion and group work, and 35.1% (98 teachers) for just lecturing. In response to the question about the *applicability of a teaching method in Armenia* (item 24), 58.1% (162 teachers) opted for the combination of lecturing, discussion and group work, 15.8% (44 teachers) for a discovery method, and 17.9% (50 teachers) for a combination of lecturing, discussion, group work and discovery. With regards to *which methods the teachers are actually using* (item 25), 68.1% (190 teachers) stated combination of lecturing, discussion and group work, 15.4 (43 teachers) a combination of lecturing, discussion, group work and discovery, and only 2.9% (8 teachers) stated lecturing only. 33.7% of the teachers consider moving on to more progressive methods of teaching and learning to be appropriate for the Armenian case.

With regards to the tendencies prevalent, the mean score ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .36$) showed that the teachers (68.1%) expressed preference for student-centred teaching and learning practices. On the other hand, the frequency distribution revealed that 267 teachers (95.7%) also believed that the teachers and students lacked the appropriate background for moving on to student-centred approaches. Another tendency was the teachers (95.7 %) believed that the combination of different approaches was the right way to proceed. In general the teachers expressed self-confidence to handle the new approach. Only 12 teachers (4.5%) opted to disagree with the notion.

The quest into differences between age and gender groups revealed no statistical significance within this scale.

Another viewpoint from which to look at the teachers' perceptions is through exploring their emotions, since emotions reveal what they have at stake (van Veen *et al.*, 2005). The scale *Emotions about Reforms* revealed ($M = 2.21$, $SD = .52$) that the teachers mostly tend to feel disappointed with the change process. 252 teachers (90.3%) stated they felt unconfident within the change process. They also claimed lack of ownership for the reforms. Only 27 teachers (9.8%) expressed their satisfaction with reforms and confessed ownership of the reforms.

To check for the relationship between the scales a correlation analysis (Table 3.6) was run, which revealed positive correlation between all the scales meaning the teachers who scored high on one scale also scored high on the others.

Table 3.6: Correlation between the variables

Measure		Beliefs about reforms	Organisational Culture	Beliefs about teaching and learning	Emotions about reforms	Change knowledge
Beliefs about reforms	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	279				
Organisational culture	Pearson Correlation	.465(**)	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	279	279			
Beliefs about teaching and learning	Pearson Correlation	.358(**)	.592(**)	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	279	279	279		
Emotions about reforms	Pearson Correlation	.662(**)	.613(**)	.593(**)	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	279	279	279	279	
Change knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.446(**)	.519(**)	.537(**)	.670(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	279	279	279	279	279

* $p < .01$

3.6.3 Teachers' causal attribution

To answer research question three, to what extent do the teachers attribute the reform outcomes to internal and external factors?, the answers to the two open-ended questions analysed in the light of the Weiner's attribution theory were used. The four change process categories summarised in table 10 were classified in terms of causes into internal, external, stable, unstable, controllable and non-controllable categories. Table 3.7 shows the eight combinations with the three properties and the frequency of responses to each of the combinations.

The results show that teachers attribute the pitfalls as a phenomenon out of their control and external (203 responses). This includes causes related to implementation flaws, negative impact of the Western reforms, corruption, mentality mismatch and incompetence of the policymakers and managers to implement reforms:

There is lack of a preparatory phase. We started radical reforms without understanding what we are supposed to do. Another problem is the pace of changes is too fast; we do not manage to absorb them. (AGR:09)

Table 3.7: Causal attribution

Cause	Internal	External	Total
Controllable	52	157	209
Non-controllable	0	203	203
Stable	0	47	47
Unstable	17	305	322
Total	69	712	781

157 responses on the flaws in the process of change were attributed to external but controllable factors: causes such as lack of information and lack of resources. To a lesser extent, in 52 responses, teachers attributed the pitfalls to internal and controllable factors. These are causes related to the lack of change knowledge, motivation to be engaged in reforms, and lack of time.

With regards to the stability of the causes, most teachers attributed such problems (305 responses) as implementation flaws, lack of appropriate background on the part of the management to conduct reforms, lack of preparedness on the part of students to be involved in the new approaches to external and uncontrollable factors:

Our students are neither ready nor motivated enough to get involved in student-centred education. I think it is premature for Armenia now. (SU:17).

To a lesser extent (47 responses), problems like change in culture, mentality mismatch, and corruption were attributed to the external stable factors:

The human resource policy is based on corruption. How can we expect to have good specialists involved in the process? Besides, the socio-economic situation compels corruption stability. (LU:01)

The reforms are in non-compliance with some features of the Armenian culture although they are intended for the Armenians. (EU:25)

17 teachers attributed problems concerning their lack of practical knowledge of the change process, lack of time, to the internal and unstable causes. No responses concerning internal and stable causes were reported.

3.7 Conclusions and discussion

The current study explored how university teachers in the Armenian higher education perceived and reacted to the reforms based on the Bologna principles. The study showed teachers to be positive towards the changes. However, many pitfalls are mentioned, which mostly refer to the organisational context of higher education. In general, there seems to be a lack of trust towards the reform imple-

mentation. Moreover, the teachers perceive the nature of the pitfalls by overwhelmingly attributing the causes of the pitfalls to external and unstable factors, which manifests lack of ownership for the reforms questioning the success of the latter.

While looking at the Armenian university teachers' perceptions through the analytic framework (Figure 3.2) combining concepts of change knowledge, organisational culture, beliefs about changes, emotions, and attribution, detailed insights into how teachers perceive and experience the reforms have surfaced leading to Scenario B.

First, the extent of change knowledge of the implementers shows only superficial understanding of the change process and dearth of good background to start the reforms, which questions cyclical approach to learning in the context while implementing reforms. It turns out that the main driving force of the change process is lacking, which brings a positive interrelationship between the variables into a halt.

Second, the organisational culture seems to have little contribution to promoting the reforms since to a greater extent the teachers considered the milieu at their institutions to be not conducive to change. The deficiencies in this particular component of educational change, as the data show, prevent the teachers from active involvement in the reform design and implementation. This implies a strong need for meticulous preliminary work at different levels and along different dimensions if changes in culture are to be achieved.



Figure 3.2: The adapted framework: the case of Armenia¹

Third, the teachers' beliefs seem to have little congruence with the reform implementation since while believing in the necessity for change they also consider preservation of the good traditions and practices prevalent during the Soviet regime to be crucial. Goodson *et al.* (2006) describe the phenomena as teachers' nostalgia, which, as they stress, is of particular importance in understanding the change process. The reasons for teachers' nostalgia, as they elaborate, are of a variety of kinds and by no means can be belittled as an overemotional indulgence of little social or political consequence. The two tendencies, to change

² The elements missing in the Armenian case are indicated in bold and italic.

and to preserve, might be attributed to teachers' desire to improve while feeling safe within the change context. From their perspective, if the reform is to be effective and sustainable it must value, learn from, and build upon the past rather than try to ignore or obliterate them (Hargreaves, 1994).

Last, but not least, teachers mainly have negative feelings about the reforms, the way they are implemented by the policymakers and administrators. In particular, the concerns are about the inaccurately developed policies and the careless attitude on the part of the policymakers toward the reform implementation. Caring, in its fullest sense, about the quality of the educational system turns to be a priority on the teachers' agenda, which is a prerequisite for any reform success. What hinders its success is the superficial attitude of the steering forces towards the changes reasoned by both lack of capacity and zeal on the part of administrators and policymakers to see the changes happen the right way. The attitude of the latter resulted in lack of ownership on the part of the teachers, which has surfaced through the attribution of outcomes to external uncontrollable and external unstable factors. This kind of attribution implies that the amount of efforts the teachers will expend on the activity in the future hardly has any potential for growth unless the external and uncontrollable factors change.

Taken as a whole, the findings stress the importance of considering teachers' agency while designing and implementing reforms (Spillane *et al.*, 2002; van den Berg, 2002; Day *et al.*, 2006), since overlooking it brings about lack of ownership for the process questioning the success of the reforms. To conclude, considering the teachers' current willingness to change, the policy makers should capture this moment and attempt to establish a serious dialogue with the teachers with the aim to develop the reforms together.

- **The Voices of Teachers
within the Context of
Higher Education
Reforms in Armenia**

CHAPTER

4



- **The Voices of Teachers within the Context of Higher Education Reforms in Armenia**

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Chapter
Four

4

Abstract

In this article, teachers' sense-making and reasoning about higher education reforms in a post-Soviet country, namely Armenia, are examined using an analytical framework with six sensitising concepts: beliefs, emotions, attitudes, change knowledge, attributions and organisational culture. The results of semi-structured interviews with 12 Armenian higher education teachers showed the teachers to mainly feel distrust towards reforms and the implementation initiatives to cause dissatisfaction, frustration and therefore distortion. At a deeper level, the teachers mostly expressed feeling excluded from the reform process and their role being depreciated. One striking feature was the predominant causal attribution of teachers to external, unstable and uncontrollable factors, which actually questions the success of the reforms.

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4.1 Introduction

Whether a reform is destined to a failure or success has been proved to largely depend on the context of reforms, existence of an active dialogue among the main stakeholders, the extent of their change knowledge, and the mode through which the change is diffused, transferred and put into a specific context (McLendon, 2003; Fullan, 2004; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). Of a particular importance is the extent to which teachers make sense of a change process, which largely determines its outcome. In the literature of educational change a distinction between the 'instrumental' versus 'agency' approaches to the role of teachers in educational reforms has been made (cf. Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan & Hopkins, 1998; Goodson, 2000; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). The former defines reforms as being quasi-objective and supra-personal, an approach, which neglects the complexity of how reforms must unfold in the daily reality of the actual implementers. The latter is seen as subjective and intrapersonal: a notion, which underpins the important role of the implementers' 'agency' and their own frames of references in the success of a reform implementation.

In this article we focus on teachers' sense-making of the educational change and their reasoning about reform implementation to deeper understand the processes driving real changes. As described in the theoretical framework we do so through an analytical framework of six sensitising concepts combining their beliefs about changes, teacher emotions within the change process, teachers' attitude towards reforms, change knowledge, causal attribution, and the environment in which they work. The logic behind combining the constructs, first, is these constructs do not exist in isolation. Rather, they are interrelated and influenced by each other. Next, bringing in a diversity of value added angles enables a better understanding of teachers' 'agency' and that of successful implementation strategies.

Further, exploring higher education teachers' sense making about reforms in a developing country like Armenia seems to provide a rich context for the study. To begin with, hardly any publication has elaborated on teacher sense-making of and reasoning about higher education reforms in the post-Soviet countries so far. Yet, more and more developing countries are involved in the global process

of educational changes. What stimulates this particular study is the results of these changes mainly seem to yield very little improvement, and in some cases even degradation of the values people have cherished for so many years (Karakhanyan *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, to deeper understand the underlying processes of teacher sense-making of and reasoning about the reforms, this study explores their own frames of references about the higher education reform implementation through semi-structured interviews of 12 Armenian higher education teachers.

4.2 Study Context

Teacher: *It is not bad but rather good for Europe, because Armenia historically and geographically is a very unique country. There is a very good anecdote, have you heard about Khrushov? Khrushov is visiting a village to see how people live there. An old man is digging a hole, Khrushov says: "We are going to communism, we are one foot in communism another in socialism." He sees that the old man is not happy at all. Khrushov asks: "Aren't you happy?" And the old man says: "How long are we going to stand legs apart?"*

Once a joke, the above observation of a major split became a reality in Armenian higher education when teachers found themselves caught between two worlds: the world of prevailing Soviet practices and the world dictated by globalisation processes and Western countries in particular.

After joining the Bologna Process in May 2005, integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) via the Bologna Declaration principles became a government priority for the Republic of Armenia. The reforms undertaken in higher and postgraduate education to date are threefold and aimed at the structure, content and management of the education. However, reforms were introduced at leading Armenian universities via pilot projects at the beginning of the 1990s, long before the appearance of the Bologna Declaration, and found both approval and resistance on the part of the actual implementers (i.e., teachers).

The changes occurring in Armenian higher education reveal some problems, which are peculiar to education systems with a strong Soviet legacy. The problems revolve around management, instructional approaches, curriculum, human development, organisational culture and the implementation of European integration reforms. Associated with the latter are the tough economic situation, prevailing corruption and meagre teacher salaries. This situation compels most teachers to search for supplemental sources of income. And when this fails, most of them opt to leave Armenia, which has only added to the brain drain that Armenia is suffering from. It is within this complex and chaotic environment that Armenian academics find themselves, and it is this increased uncertainty that makes effective reform beyond the vision of many. Finally, during the implementation of reforms, which occurs in a mainly top-down manner (Karakhanyan *et al.*, 2010), teacher frames of reference are hardly taken into account despite teachers being the ones responsible for the implementation of reforms and the degree of teacher involvement determining the degree of reform success.

4.3 Theoretical framework

According to Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002), “the process by which implementing agents come to understand policy, the understandings that result, and the consequences of those understandings for policy implementation are rarely analysed explicitly in conventional implementation models” (p. 392). Yet, teacher sense-making within the context of reform is crucial because different teachers can arrive at different interpretations of the same policy directive and sometimes even misinterpret policy intentions (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). In the sense-making process, teacher *beliefs*, *attitudes* and *emotions* or irrefutable personal meanings or ‘truths’ (van den Berg, 2002) often determine the decisions which they make and the amount of energy which they are willing to invest in their work and thus reform processes (Pajares, 1992; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996). Teachers also make sense of reforms and either adopt or reject the opinions of others with the aid of their own experiences and *knowledge* (Fullan, 2007). The *organisational culture* — which can be held together by feelings of belonging, power, respect, fear or apprehension — also plays a role in teacher sense-mak-

ing (van den Berg, 2002). The culture within an organisation also influences the functioning of teachers, which leads to the question of “how developments can be steered in such a manner that the personal identities and meanings of those directly involved are also taken maximally into consideration” (van den Berg, 2002, p. 584).

In this article, teachers’ sense-making within a context of reform was examined in terms of their ‘agency’ and reasoning about change in order to understand the message they want to convey via particular behaviours. In doing this, their beliefs about reforms, attitudes towards reforms, change knowledge, emotions within the context of reform and organisational cultures will be examined. In addition, Weiner’s Attribution Theory (2000) will be called upon for a meaningful interpretation of the data.

4.3.1 Change knowledge

The driving force behind any kind of change is a deep understanding of the relevant concepts, processes and values involved. Only with such an understanding can the change endeavour be appreciated and followed. In most cases, there is also an insufficient appreciation and use of what Fullan refers to as *change knowledge*, that is: insight into the meaning and change process and an understanding of the significance of the change (Fullan, 2004, 2007). The crux of change, as Fullan states, is how individuals come to grips with a new reality.

Failure to understand a change process and/or the significance of a change often creates dilemmas. For successful reform, that is, both the *subjective* and *objective* significance of the change process must be understood. Both the *individual context* and *broader social context* for a reform must be understood for the reform to be successful. As Fullan (2007) points out, strategies for change have so far failed to bring these different worlds together and thus resulted in failure or only superficial change. And what Fullan therefore recommends for the change of both individuals and systems simultaneously is a single guideline, namely to learn in the actual situations which we want to change or, in other words, ‘learning in context.’

In this article *change knowledge* will be used to better understand the extent to which teachers are ready to engage in a change process and bring it to fruition.

4.3.2 Beliefs

Teacher beliefs can be viewed as the lens through which teachers perceive reforms and thus as something that influences their decision-making and behaviour. According to van den Berg (2002), beliefs have a relatively strong cognitive component as they typically reflect the opinions of teacher with regard to the process of teaching and learning. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) state that beliefs concern what one thinks is true regardless of the approval of the others. Some researchers see teacher beliefs as providing a framework for the organisation of meaning and thereby something which informs teacher practices (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Others see teacher beliefs as something, which influences their sense-making, decision-making and effectiveness (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). And still others provide an exhaustive list of elements, which can be assumed to compose teacher beliefs and thereby shape their judgments, evaluations, thinking and action (Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2006). In contrast, others show an insufficient relation to exist between teacher beliefs and practices employed in the classroom (e.g. Wilcox-Herzog & Ward, 2004).

Drawing upon the above, it can be expected that higher education teachers who truly believe in the necessity of reform will be sufficiently motivated to change their daily practices, experiment with new approaches and not distort the necessary concepts. Conversely, teachers who do not believe in the necessity of a reform will try to preserve their usual practices or only adapt new approaches to existing ones and thereby distort both approaches.

4.3.3 Attitudes

Attitude is defined as the individual's prevailing tendency to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person or group of people, institutions or events. An attitude can be positive or negative. Social psychologists distinguish the following components of attitudes: a) the cognitive component or knowledge of the object of an attitude, whether accurate or not; b) the affective component or feelings towards the object of an attitude; and c) the behavioural component or action taken with respect to the object of an attitude (Barros & Elia, 1998; van

den Berg, 2002). Change is an extremely complex process, and teacher attitudes certainly play a role in the change process (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996). For a reform to take effect, it is critical that the implementers have a positive attitude towards it and learning about it.

Eggen and Kauchak (2001) have identified a number of teacher attitudes, which appear to be conducive to a supportive classroom environment: enthusiasm, caring, firmness, democratic practices aimed at the promotion of student responsibility, effective use of lesson time, established and efficient routines, motivation of students and free interaction with students. Brunning *et al.* (1999) having similarly shown teacher attitudes such as personal efficacy, modelling, enthusiasm, caring and high expectations to promote learner motivation.

In light of the above, it can thus be expected that teachers with positive attitudes towards proposed changes will be sufficiently motivated to make the changes happen. Such factors as the environment in which they work, their competence, their perceived self-efficacy, their incentives, their role within the organisation and the coherence of the reforms with their beliefs will greatly affect their attitudes, however.

4.3.4 Emotions

The role of emotions in the professional lives of teachers has gained a lot of attention recently. Emotions can profoundly influence cognitive processes. The affective response to a target often forms the basis for judgments. And given the difficulty of distinguishing pre-existing feelings from responses to a target, people have been found to evaluate a target more positively when they are in a happy as opposed to sad mood (cf. Schwarz, 2000).

Zembylas (2005) has examined emotional suffering and freedom to elaborate on the successes and failures of particular regimes within a particular school culture and proposed that the emotional navigation and coping strategies of teachers reveal an interesting micro-political perspective. In the research of van Veen *et al.* (2005), educational reforms have been shown to negatively affect the

professional identities of teachers at times. The enthusiasm of reform enthusiasts have been found to decline, for example, when local definitions and conditions for a reform create conflicts and/or overwork. Another emotional and cognitive influence on the perceptions and behaviour of implementers is nostalgia with regard to the past experience (Goodson *et al.*, 2006), which may be interpreted as a feeling of uncertainty within a change context and desire to feel safe.

Within the emotions domain, which plays a central role in change processes, is the degree of ownership for reforms and the desire to change (Hargreaves, 1994; van den Berg, 2002). Understanding the teacher's drive for change versus preservation can, as Hargreaves (1994) argues, provide valuable insight into how change is most effectively undertaken, what should change and what should not.

4.3.5 Organisational culture

Another phenomenon, which may explain why the teachers behave in the manner in which they do, is the organisational culture in which they must function. Is the culture conducive to change and therefore learning and creating or not, for example. In Schein's words (1997), culture is a phenomenon, which surrounds all of us; it thus helps to understand how it is created, embedded, developed, manipulated, managed and changed.

Many leading scholars on school improvement have emphasised the tight ties between the organisational culture and change processes (Hargreaves, 1994; Hopkins, 2001). Evans (2001) outlines six key determinants of the organisational setting and its changeability potential: occupational framework, politics, history, stress, finances and culture.

With regards to organisational change, Hargreaves (1994) and Fullan (1996a, 2007) emphasise the role of *re-culturing* and *restructuring* for the success of reforms as these two concepts imply change in the teachers' beliefs, habits, norms and values rather than mere changes at programme and procedural level. For systemic reform, Fullan (1996a) emphasises *re-culturing* because this involves

new conceptions about teaching and learning and new forms of professionalism. In this study, organisational culture is assumed to contain critical clues to successful educational improvement and institutional change. To determine the extent to which the culture of higher education in Armenia is conducive to change, it will thus be examined in terms of behavioural regularities and the norms, values and beliefs of the teachers involved.

4.3.6 Attribution theory

Weiner (1992) uses attribution theory to understand achievement outcomes and thus seeks to find the causes of success and failure within an achievement setting. According to him, the most important factors affecting attributions are ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. The basic principle of attribution theory with regards to motivation is that a person's own perceptions or attributions for success and failure determine the amount of effort the person will expend on that activity in the future. The theory emphasises the idea that agents are strongly motivated by the pleasant outcome of being able to feel good about themselves. An important assumption underlying attribution theory is also that people will interpret their environment in such a way as to maintain a positive self-image. This means attribution of their successes and failures to factors, which will allow them to feel as good as possible about themselves. In cases of success, the success will be attributed to their own efforts and abilities. In cases of failure, the failure will be attributed to factors over which they have no control (Weiner, 1992).

To better understand the motivational consequences of causal beliefs, Weiner suggests altering the qualitative differences between causes such as effort and ability to make quantitative differences. This is only possible, however, for causes on some psychological dimensions documented as three aspects of causal attributions: (1) locus, (2) stability and (3) controllability (2000, p.4). Locus refers to the location of the cause, which is either within or outside the actor; stability refers to the duration of a cause with aptitude representing a stable cause and chance representing an unstable cause; and controllability refers to such volitional aspects of a cause as effort; luck and aptitude are, in contrast, less wilfully changed. According to Weiner, all causal attributions can be located along these

three dimensions although there might be some disagreement on the location of a cause since this depends upon people's perceptions. Through attributional analyses, this study attempts to provide a window on teachers' reasoning and sense-making within a reform context.

4.4 Research questions

In this study, the following research questions were of interest.

1. How do higher education teachers in Armenia make sense of ongoing reforms?
2. How can teachers' reasoning about the outcomes of the reforms best be understood?

Semi-structured interviews with 12 higher education teachers were undertaken to answer the questions. The interview questions drew upon the concepts highlighted in the theoretical framework outlined here and the results of a previous survey (Karakhanyan *et al.*, 2010).

4.5 Methods

4.5.1 Procedure

The teachers interviewed in this study were selected on the basis of results for 279 teachers included in a 2008 study (Karakhanyan *et al.*, 2010). Given that one of the aims in the present study was to identify patterns of teacher perceptions, their support for changes and their resistance to changes, three groups of teachers were formed for the interviews: (1) those positively oriented towards reforms; (2) those neutral with regard to reforms; and (3) those negatively oriented towards reforms.

4.5.2 Participants

The interviews of the 12 teachers took place in Yerevan, Armenia, in November and December of 2008. The teachers came from four different universities. For confidentiality reasons, we refer to the universities as A, B, C and D. Fictitious names have also been used for the respondents. The background information

on the teachers in the different groups is summarised below. As can be seen, the teachers varied with regard to their background teaching experiences during Soviet times, exposure to Western educational practices and exposure to Western culture.

Group 1: Positively oriented towards the change process

- Erik, University A, Assistant Professor, 15 years of teaching experience, background in educational change and exposure to Western educational
- Gor, University D, Assistant Professor, 23 years of teaching experience, exposure to Western culture.
- Grethen, University B, Assistant Professor, 15 years of teaching experience, some exposure to the Western educational system
- Joan, University B, Assistant professor, 18 years of teaching experience, some exposure to Western culture

Group 2: Neutral with regard to the change process

- Arthur, University A, Associate Professor, 12 years of teaching experience, no exposure to Western culture
- Galina, University C, Associate Professor, 40 years of teaching experience, exposure to Western educational system
- Koryun, University A, Associate Professor, 14 years of teaching experience, broad exposure to both Western culture and educational system.
- Sima, University A, Assistant Professor, 33 years of teaching experience, no exposure to the Western culture

Group 3: Negatively oriented towards the change process

- Ed, University B, Associate Professor, 39 years of teaching experience, no exposure to Western educational system
- Kristine, University A, senior instructor, 25 years of teaching experience, broad exposure to both Western culture and educational system

- Nina, University A, former senior instructor, 10 years of teaching experience, no exposure to Western culture, 7 months ago left teaching position due to problems she encountered with the reforms
- Roman, University A, senior instructor, 39 years of teaching experience, no exposure to Western culture

4.5.3 Interviews

The questions for the semi-structured interviews were developed on the basis of the relevant literature and the previous questionnaire results. The questions focused on the following topics: beliefs about reforms, emotions within the change process, change knowledge, attitudes towards reforms, organisational culture and causal attributions. To give voice to any further teacher concerns, they were also given an opportunity to add any information, which they found relevant.

Seven interviews were conducted in English, which enabled a Dutch colleague to help with the interviews. The other five interviews were conducted in Armenian with only one researcher thus present. All of the interviews were started with standard introductory questions followed by clarification questions, discussion questions and sometimes a request to explain different concepts. The duration of the interviews varied from 1 hour up to 2 hours and 40 minutes. Of the 12 teachers, 6 were asked for an additional meeting to clarify some discrepancies encountered in the initial interviews. In the end, thus a total of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The interviews were audio-recorded, and those conducted in the Armenian language were translated into English. The written English transcripts were sent to the teachers for authorisation. All of the teachers in the sample agreed with the content of the transcripts. During each interview notes were taken; made comments to improve the interview questions; registered their impressions of the interview process; indicated the openness of the respondents; and noted prospective questions for possible follow-up interviews.

4.6 Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed on the basis of a coding system originally put forth by Miles and Huberman (1994). To funnel the analysis of the data, the coding process was carried out using the ATLAS.ti 5.5 (2004) software program. The research questions, structure of the data collection and coding system were also based upon the previous questionnaire results and theory. While coding the interview data, we further followed the logical-deductive approach of Charmaz (2000), which entails coding using preconceived concepts but also free coding in order to capture any new concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The initial transcripts were analysed in a sequence of phases. First, descriptive codes related to the research questions were assigned to the interview segments as deemed relevant. Families of codes were next created in order to summarise the selected interview segments in terms of different target concepts (i.e., families of codes).

(1) *Beliefs about reforms.* For this concept, the codes could be divided into two major groups, namely beliefs about the reforms and beliefs about teaching and learning. The beliefs about structural and technical changes were assigned general reform codes. The beliefs about the content of not only teaching and learning but also the approaches best employed were assigned teaching and learning approach codes.

(2) *Attitudes towards reforms.* For this concept, the responses fell into three groups: negative, neutral or positive. Responses in favour of the former Soviet structure and critical of new approaches fell into the group of negative codes. Responses in favour of the former Soviet structure but, at the same time, expressing support for the new approaches, if implemented properly, fell into the group of neutral codes. Responses strongly supporting the new approaches and considering the former Soviet structure to be obsolete fell into the group of positive codes.

(3) *Emotions about reforms.* For this concept, the codes could be divided

into positive and negative ones. Responses reflecting enthusiasm with regard to the reform, happiness with results, eagerness about the opportunities, which the reforms will open and ownership of the reform process were coded as positive. Responses expressing frustration, distrust, fear of losing one's job and fear of losing good old traditions were coded as negative.

(4) *Change knowledge.* Indicators of change knowledge were the teachers' reasoning with regard to various reform concepts, processes and values. Responses expressing teacher knowledge about the policies and procedures promoting reforms were coded as processes of change. The ones expressing the underlying principles of change were coded as meaning of change.

(5) *Organisational culture.* For this concept, an attempt was made to reveal the extent to which a culture conducive to the required changes was present or not. Organisations, which capitalised on opportunities for not only learning and creating but also teacher involvement in the change process, were considered conducive to change. Organisations in which the teachers were not involved in the change process and the management took no steps to create a learning environment were considered not conducive to change.

(6) *Causal attributions.* Teacher attributions were coded in keeping with the three aspects of causal attributions identified by Weiner (1992, 2000). With regard to causal locus, interview responses in which the teachers attributed causes of reform failure to their own lack of knowledge, information or skills were coded as internal. Responses in which the teachers attributed causes to students, administrators or policymakers were coded as external. With regard to the stability of attributions, responses indicating that the causes of failure were perceived to have little potential for change such as corruption, culture, mentality or aptitude were coded as stable. Responses, which reflected some potential for change within a relatively short period of time such as competency, skills, knowledge of reforms, lack of resources or implementation flaws were coded as reflecting unstable attribution. With regard to controllability, which entails volitional alterations, responses, which indicated that the teachers thought that they could

tackle things once they had access to the necessary resources, were coded as attributions involving controllable causation. Responses, which referred to causes beyond the locus of the teachers' control such as the behaviour of management and policymakers, incapacity on the part of colleagues or students, corruption or a peculiar mentality, were coded as attributions involving uncontrollable causation.

To check on the validity of the classifications, peer debriefing was conducted. A few disagreements arose with regard to the category of code and attempts were made to achieve consensus.

Both intra- and inter-rater reliability tests were conducted using SPSS. The intra-rater reliability calculated across a three-week time span was .96 (Cohen's kappa). For the inter-rater reliability, another researcher coded a selection of 80 interview segments, and this revealed a reliability of .82 (Cohen's kappa). A few disagreements were found to occur and mostly reflect differences in the amount of insight into the different cultural backgrounds of the respondents.

In order to better understand the data, the relevant information was summarised in the form of a matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was done for each teacher, for each group of teachers and for each university. The group data matrices and university data matrices were analysed separately then compared to each other and summarised. Finally, an output summary was developed with references to the transcripts, coded segments, families of codes and matrices.

4.7 Results

4.7.1 Teachers' sense-making within the context of reform

In order to answer the question of *how higher education teachers in Armenia make sense of ongoing reforms*, six sensitising concepts were used to explore the reform sense-making of 12 teachers.

4.7.1.1 Attitudes

With regard to the attitudes of the teachers towards the reforms, the 12 teachers in this study fell into three groups: (1) positive orientation towards the changes; (2) neutral orientation towards the changes; and (3) negative orientation towards the changes.

The characteristics of the teachers in the different groups can be described as follows.

Group 1: Positive orientation towards changes

The teachers in this group strongly believed in the benefits of student-centred teaching and learning and strived to apply new reform methods. Their descriptions of their classes, however, reflected incorporation of only some aspects of the new techniques and therefore less than full application. With regard to structural changes arising from the reforms, they viewed the new system as providing more opportunities. They also saw an urgent need to change the system and the need to do their best to promote such change but also many organisational reform obstacles.

Joan: *What I do now is to deliver the lecture, and then I give them the necessary homework assignments and the necessary reading materials. Students are supposed to work on the assignments independently and during the next class we try to solve any problems via discussion. Sometimes we have discussions or sometimes they are passive; but with questioning, the students become more active, maybe we need to become more involved in the [reform] process to feel more ownership for the reforms; becoming an active member of the group stimulates greater attachment to goals.*

Group 2: Neutral with regard to changes

The teachers in this group consider some elements of the new approaches to be appropriate but want to preserve the Soviet approaches by integrating aspects of the new approaches. There is a conception that the new approaches really

do not offer anything new but, rather, simply word the old practices differently. Another attitude is that the Soviet approaches provide for broader learning but the new approaches for deeper learning. As a consequence, the incorporation of the two is considered a sophisticated blend. As for structural changes, these teachers think the new system offers greater opportunities but that the teachers and students are not yet ready.

Koryun: *To say I have totally changed my approaches would be an overstatement. I would never say, and to be honest, I would hate to use quite different methods. Because having had, to a certain extent, the Soviet experience, I am using Soviet methods as well and they do have good standing even nowadays. Coming back from the USA, naturally, ... what I did was to combine the good side of the Soviet methods with some American methods. I put them together and, from my perspective, I have a good combination of Soviet methods side by side with American ones.*

Group 3: Negative orientation towards changes

The teachers in this group consider the Soviet approaches to teaching and learning to have advantages over the new approaches and to ensure a better quality of education. These teachers have therefore made no changes to their teaching practices, as they see no need to. They consider student-centred learning to be part of the former Soviet approaches. With regard to structural changes, they consider the current reforms to be superficial and more likely to cause damage than help. Also they consider the Armenian culture to have peculiarities and values, which should be preserved and protected from Western influences. The teachers in this group see a lot of problems with integration into the European family and thus problems with the implementation of reforms.

Kristine: *I do not want to be misunderstood because I am not, definitely, I am not a fan of this new system. We see the destruction of a good system. We both know that leaving [high]*

school we had really good basic knowledge. I am already 50 and, at the age of fifty, being a linguist and being very far from [natural] sciences, ... till now I keep in my brains all the knowledge I got at school [about the subjects], ... which helps me in my life. In general, I keep to the idea that now Western, I speak about the British system, for example, because I know UK education, they are already suffering ... For example, I am absolutely against such stupid things as giving a student a chance to choose a subject they want to learn.

As the results show, the teachers differed in their attitudes towards the reforms.

4.7.1.2 Change knowledge

The teachers in all of the groups reported a lack of sufficient practical knowledge for the reform implementation. The teachers in the positively oriented group reported having some knowledge of the change process (i.e., vision) but lacked practical knowledge and complained of vague conceptions for a lot of the points of change.

Eric (Group 1): *[The teachers] feel, they understand something is changing in their responsibilities, approaches. They understand they cannot be traditional teachers. They should change, but they can't understand "how" and "when" because they do not know how to apply things in actual practice.*

The teachers in the neutrally oriented group demonstrated some understanding of the educational paradigm change. However, responses showed an absence of deeper knowledge of the reform values at least in part because the teachers in this group neither see a need for change nor have sufficient motivation to change.

Interviewer: *Can you briefly state the aims of the reforms?*

Arthur (Group 2): *Learning is performed for the sake of a*

market economy, not for the sake of learning per se, I would say.

Interviewer: *What other goals are there?*

Arthur: *I can't say. By the way, this system of education makes us more pragmatic, that is why I just mentioned the market economy as of vital importance.*

The teachers in the negatively oriented group demonstrated a lack of clear understanding of the reform goals and misconceptions about the Bologna principles in general and student-centred teaching and learning in particular.

Interviewer: *Well, curricula problems you have are not because of the Bologna process.*

Ed (Group 3): *Then what is the use of having the system?*

Interviewer: *Promoting mobility, transparency, employability...*

Ed: *Ah, now I get it.*

Kristine (Group 3): *First of all, we do not really understand this Bologna agreement properly. Maybe it is not really bad. We must investigate. We can't just take it blindly because Europe takes ... It is not right to impose reforms without knowing the culture.*

The teachers in this group also think that the lack of knowledge about reform *per se* and its implementation has resulted in misperceptions and, therefore, distortion. This is mainly the case with the design of curricula.

Roman (Group 3): *What is a module? I can't understand up until today. What does it mean: "We are having a module today"? Is it the same written test? Is it something different? The ideas are mixed ... the phenomena are mixed, and they are mixed in the wrong way. I think the reforms are incorrectly*

understood, misinterpreted, probably the innovations would have had a positive influence... but we are having negative results.

4.7.1.3 Beliefs about reforms

Regarding the teachers' beliefs about reform in general and the changing educational practices in particular, as Kristine (Group 3) summarises, all the 12 teachers indicated mainly support for a combination of teacher-centred and student-centred approaches.

Kristine: *We take partially teacher-centred and partially student-centred and combine. If we take only teacher-centred ... your pupils become robots, they lose their ability to think. But if you take only student-centred, they are becoming impudent bastards, sorry, because they think ...they know everything in this life and try to impose their stupidity on you and you can't control them any longer, it is difficult.*

In particular, the teachers in the positively oriented group view the new system as offering more opportunities via greater mobility at the national and international levels. They prefer, moreover, to stimulate students to learn and not just be the passive recipients of transmitted knowledge. They also think that democratic and open relationships with teachers will stimulate active student learning.

Joan (Group 1): *The activation of the students resulted in eagerness to attend classes whereas previously they used to skip them. They became more interested and therefore motivated. Then competition started... Moreover, this new system opens more chances for our education to be recognised abroad.*

However, the teachers in this group also pointed out at the level of actual implementation that the changes were superficial.

Gretchen (Group 1): *Not much has changed nowadays... We used to deliver lectures, but now we just give them the package, not much difference in the content ... in which we also include the electronic sources. Then we tell them to spend more time working individually, but not all the students can work in such a situation. I think our students are not ready to work independently.*

The neutrally oriented teachers also view the new system as offering greater student mobility. However, they also believe that the new educational approaches are not applicable to Armenian reality because the mentalities of both teachers and students as well as some deeply-rooted traditions are not compatible with the new educational approaches.

Sima (Group 2): *There is a Russian expression, "we are throwing the baby out with the bath water." I think that we should have taken everything good from the Soviet approach together with this new one. We should also take into account the specific features of our teaching system, our education system and our people. You can change the ways of teaching but you can't change the ways of thinking because there are traditions and values embedded in them, things that still make sense for people.*

Just as the neutrally oriented teachers, the negatively oriented teachers considered the reform to be a superficial one and also one which is likely to cause damage. These teachers consider the Armenian culture to have peculiarities and values that should be preserved and protected from Western influence. They think the integration into the EHEA and reform implementation will damage the system, which they cherish and think is truly good. One of the main concerns to emerge in this group was the content of the teaching and student motivation. Most of the teachers think that the content in the new approaches is less challenging than before and will therefore prompt students to become less serious about their education.

Kristine (Group3): *New approaches to teaching and learning bring about degradation of our students.*

Interviewer: *Would you say that the problem is the change of methods or the content of the education?*

Kristine: *I would say both. First of all, the content; it must be serious. As I see what they are trying to do all over the world, they are trying to make student study look like a game. This is not good because student study is serious and the student should know it is serious...*

4.7.1.4 Emotions

With regard to the emotions of the teachers within the reform context, all of the teachers expressed strong emotions and thereby indicated that they had a lot at stake. The teachers in the positive group felt enthusiastic about the reforms. They did not, however, express the same emotions with regard to the manner in which the changes were being implemented. They reported not being able to be completely open with the administration for fear of being frowned upon. Only their relationships with the students and making progress encouraged them.

Erik (Group 1): *I am happy with these reforms. I like changes in my life and I want to see everything changed...[However], it is really very difficult for me to turn to the Chair or some other administrative staff with a question or proposal, because they will not understand, they will think it is only my interest.*

The teachers in the neutral group mostly felt disappointed with the manner in which the reforms were being handled. They also feared being misunderstood by the administration if they came up with an initiative. A fear of being fired was prevalent. These teachers mostly felt ownership only for the subjects they taught but were not ready to actually undertake any reforms.

Koryun (Group 2): *This is not my fault; this comes from above. I do not feel ownership, quite honestly not. ... Basically I do it because I am told to do it. My personal input would be 30%, I am for it, and 70% comes from above.*

The teachers in the negatively oriented group expressed fear, irritation, a lack of ownership and feelings of being blamed for negative reform outcomes. However, they also emphasised their love of their jobs and felt ownership for the subject being taught.

Roman (Group 3): *First of all, I should be very grateful to you, because up to now I have had no place to express my thoughts, because I do not want to be fired. It is terrible. Fear is the most terrible thing. With fear, we will not be able to contribute wholly.*

Overall, all the teachers in the three groups expressed disappointment and frustration with the reform implementation in general and the attitudes of the administration towards them in particular.

Interviewer: *How do you feel within the context of the reforms?*

Arthur (Group 2): *Frustrated, not with the reforms but with the manner in which they are being implemented. The attitude is frustrating... I opt for leaving the country. Perhaps for the time being; for a change. I am sick and tired. I am just frustrated with the way it is being implemented... Sometimes I want to stand up and cry out: "Guys, I want to learn, give me a chance!"*

4.7.1.5 Organisational culture

With regard to the organisational culture, the 12 teachers indicated mainly a lack of a learning culture within the organisations; a lack which the teachers attributed mainly to the management styles. One of the main implementation issues, as the teachers put it, is a lack of teacher incentives to actively involve them in the reform process. Such incentives as financial benefits, more explicit involvement in the change process, appreciation of the teacher's job and role in the reform process, appropriate resources, professional development incentives, cooperative culture, greater autonomy for curricular development, well-balanced workload and good administration were reported to be largely missing.

Table 4.1: *Organisational Culture*

	<i>Universities</i>	<i>Organisational Culture</i>
1	University A	Lack of team work, learning culture, the environment is not conducive to learning, isolation among the colleagues and chairs, negative attitude of the rector to the employees, the atmosphere is chaotic, threatening and stressful, the leadership is accumulated in the hands of few, the administration has no capacity to implement the reforms
2	University B	Absence of learning culture, the administration is supportive, also there are good traditions preserved, collaboration among teachers is only at formal level, the reforms are top-down.
3	University C	The environment demands being cautious, lack of informal get together, no learning culture
4	University D	The administration is very supportive, there is lack of appropriate human resources, the whole environment should be changed.

With the exception of universities B and D, which reported the management to be supportive, all the universities in the sample had an organisational environment, which was not conducive to change. Even in universities B and D where the management was supportive, a culture to promote real change appeared to be lacking.

Ed (Group 3): *The whole environment, the culture should change. Of course the culture at the university should change.*

Interviewer: *What is the problem?*

Ed: *If we speak about the environment, it is mere dishonesty, chaos. Students feel it; they come over and say that they really feel unhappy with what is going on.*

The causes are mainly attributed to the Armenian mentality.

Arthur (Group 2): *It is a matter of culture, why not. We, the Armenians, always consider ourselves superior. It is in our heart and mind, and we are not up to learning from others. We think that we know better, we can do the same job better, and we think we are the best.*

Yet another cause for the absence of a facilitative organisational culture was attributed to the management practices.

Gretchen (Group 1): *We just started [the reform], out of the blue ... It is like, it was ordered to be implemented and done without preparation, without knowing what the situation is. These are some of the reasons. The administrators actually sufficiently lack both deep knowledge and appropriate experience to implement such reforms.*

Apart from the attitudes and practices of the management, the teachers also reported most of the leadership being concentrated in only the hands of a few.

Roman (Group 3): *Leadership is concentrated in only the administration, just there...no, only one ruler, a dictator. Top-down.*

4.7.2 Teachers' reasoning about reform outcomes

To answer the question of how teachers' reasoning about the outcomes of the reforms can best be understood, the teachers' reasoning with regard to the reforms was analysed in terms of Weiner's attribution theory.

The categories summarised in Table 4.2 indicate the attribution of causes to internal, external, stable, unstable, controllable and uncontrollable factors. Eight combinations could be distinguished although they did not all occur in the interviews with the teachers: (1) internal controllable, (2) external controllable, (3) internal uncontrollable, (4) external uncontrollable, (5) internal stable, (6) external stable, (7) internal unstable and (8) external unstable.

The results show an inclination for the teachers to attribute the reform pitfalls to uncontrollable external factors (161 codes). This includes implementation flaws, the potentially negative impact of Western reforms, corruption, mentality mismatches and implementation incompetence among policymakers and managers.

Table 4.2: *Causal Attribution*

Cause	Internal	External
Controllable	19	15
Non-controllable	12	161
Stable	0	37
Unstable	29	153

The teachers also complained about the students' lack of motivation and reported that this contributed to their own lackadaisical attitudes towards teaching.

Sima (Group 2): *Students have no motivation to learn nowadays. If I put the diplomas on the table and sell them, they would take them happily and leave the university without any education. They realise that they need an education, but they also realise that nobody needs their education. They see different people buying diplomas and getting positions and get discouraged.*

Another concern expressed by the teachers is that only a few teachers respect their students and have the capacity to handle the class.

Erik (Group 1): *Most teachers are not born to be teachers. In any case, you must respect students. They are human beings and also have all rights. I am a problem for traditional teachers ... they are my colleagues, but when it comes to innovations I become a problem for them, which means that they are not competent enough to handle the changes.*

Among external controllable factors (15 codes) were a lack of information and a lack of resources. The teachers also attributed the reform pitfalls to themselves at times (19 codes) and thus to such internal controllable factors as a lack of change knowledge, lack of motivation for the reforms and lack of time.

Regarding the stability of the attributed causes, the teachers attributed many of the problems to unstable external factors (153 codes), which included implementation flaws, the fast pace of the reforms and a lack of appropriate background knowledge on the part of the management to manage the reforms.

Ed (Group 3): *In my opinion, the administration and policy makers do not have the necessary capacity, even more, a desire to reform. They say "well, Europe says so, so let's do it.*

Type it up, and report it.” They are not even interested in the impact of the changes on the teachers or the students. There is a principle, if there is a system, any random change will sooner damage it than change it for the better. This reform was done randomly, for the sake of check out.

To a lesser extent (37 codes), the teachers attributed the reform problems to stable external factors such as insufficient change culture, mentality mismatch or corruption.

Roman (Group 3): *The policies and procedures promoting a learning culture are not really developed or they are developed through corruption. They are never honest, if there is a regulation it can be changed easily with money.*

Finally, the reform problems were also attributed to such unstable internal causes (29 codes) as lack of time and the teachers’ lack of practical knowledge of the change process. No reform problems were attributed to stable internal factors, which suggests flexibility and a willingness to change on the part of the teachers.

4.8 Conclusions and discussion

The aim of this article was to explore teachers’ sense-making within a context of educational change and examine their reasoning with regard to reform outcomes in a post-Soviet country. The context of the study was the post-Soviet country of Armenia where higher education reforms have been aimed at changes of structure, content and management practices. Throughout the past 20 years, higher education teachers, at the initiative of their supervisors, have been trying to change the educational practices inherited from the former Soviet system. This endeavour has revealed a complex reality with a lack of the necessary change knowledge to implement reforms, a lack of steering capacity on the part of management and an organisational culture, which is not sufficient to promote deep

change. The change process has brought about negative emotions and, in some cases, even a fear of losing one's job, which obviously undermines the few incentives which implementers may have. In general, the teachers in this study reported support for reforms when implemented properly.

Many of the issues appear to be related to the lack of the necessary knowledge for change on the part of both teachers and management. The results show the teachers to have only superficial knowledge of the change process and insufficient background knowledge to start the reforms. Such an absence of change knowledge is difficult to rectify, however. Driven by a desire for quick fixes, for example, change leaders may not have taken time to allow change knowledge to be built and thus neglected this critical element (Fullan, 2004).

The groups of teachers with a positive, negative or neutral orientation towards the reforms all appeared to believe in the necessity of change but emphasised that the changes had to be implemented with sufficient care for the process to be successful. A strong belief in the need to preserve the good aspects of the traditions and practices prevalent during the Soviet regime was clearly present together with a strong belief in the need to prevent negative Western influences. These two tendencies, namely towards change but also towards preservation, may reflect the teachers' desire to improve and change but in a safe environment. In other words, change can happen at the practical level when the implementation process provides a good background.

The teachers' emotions within the reform context show them to be deeply concerned about the inaccurately developed policies and careless attitudes of policymakers and administrators. In fact, the stance of policymakers and administrators has brought about frustration, a fear of being fired, a fear of being misunderstood, depreciation of teachers' job, disappointment and a lack of ownership. The strong emotions expressed by the teachers show just how much they have at stake and their strong desire to contribute to the reform process. What appears to hinder things is underestimation of the teachers' capacities and insufficient ap-

preciation of their desire for active involvement in the design and implementation of reforms. Nonetheless, the attitudes conducive to effective changes appear to be lacking, namely enthusiasm and caring, in addition to democratic practices to promote student responsibility and free interaction.

If we look at the organisational cultures, most of them could be seen to provide little support for effective reform implementation. To begin with, the management styles did not appear to be conducive to practical change. Isolation of the teachers from the change process and limiting their role in the design and implementation of the reforms manifested itself as a lack of a culture conducive to learning and change. Teachers, who undertake reform simply because they have to but with widespread distrust of the reforms and nostalgia for the “good old times”, is then the case. And such a culture appears to have a profoundly negative effect upon the organisation’s capacity to engage in change and implement the otherwise desired reforms (Fullan & Scott, 2009).

If we look at the teachers’ reasoning about the reforms, their major concerns were about uncontrollable external factors and unstable external factors or, in other words, causal attributions, which suggest only superficial, structural change or a complete failure to change. The teachers mainly complained about flawed implementation of the reforms and ascribed the causes of the flawed implementation to incompetent policymakers and administrators, incompetent peers and immature students. These types of attributions suggest that the amount of effort, which the teachers will expend on reform activity in the future, is minimal and has little potential for growth unless the external and uncontrollable factors change. The attribution of negative reform outcomes to external and largely uncontrollable factors also suggests a lack of ownership on the part of the teachers for the reforms and a lack of involvement in the change process.

In sum, the implementation strategies promoted by policymakers and university top management but also a lack of relevant change knowledge on the part of the implementers of the reforms were found to constitute major obstacles to reform

success. Misinformation, misinterpretation and a general distrust of the reforms being transferred from the West was the result. By attacking cherished values and not providing sufficient alternatives, the new system promoted by the Armenian policymakers failed to provide a safe or supportive environment and thus a context conducive to change. It follows, thus, that unless action is undertaken to promote more meaningful change via clearly articulated and well-informed implementation policies, the success of any education reform will be questionable.



- **What do leaders think?
Reflections on the Implementation
of Higher Education
Reforms in Armenia**

CHAPTER

5



- **What do leaders think?**
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*Leaders are more powerful role models
when they learn than when they teach.*

-Rosabeth Moss Kantor

Chapter
Five

5

Abstract

Leader perceptions of higher education reforms in Armenia are examined in order to gain insight into how they view the reforms, their role in the reforms and the roles of others. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Armenian higher education leaders and analysed in terms of the following five aspects relevant to leadership: policy transfer and diffusion, change knowledge, emotional intelligence, leadership approach and causal attribution. The leaders spoke positively about the reform efforts but blamed teachers, government, students and society for the failure of the reform efforts in Armenia. The conclusion is that, irrelevant of whether the change is top-down or bottom-up, it is destined to fail if the change knowledge of the actual implementers is not taken into consideration, an active dialogue does not occur with the actual implementers of the changes and the implements of change are thus not involved in the reform process.

A new version of this chapter has been accepted as Karakhanyan, S., van Veen, K., Bergen, Th. C. M, "What do leaders think? Reflections on the implementation of higher education reforms in Armenia" in the *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*.

5.1 Introduction

In the educational change literature, the importance of an active dialogue between the key players - namely teachers, top management and policymakers - is being increasingly emphasised. Gaps between the key players appear to result in dilemmas regarding the intended change and the placement of blame (Goldwasser, 1992; Rosenblatt *et al.*, 2007). Teachers blame leaders for incompetent handling of reform implementation, and leaders blame teachers for lack of motivation and involvement in the reform process.

The role of educational leaders within the context of change is crucial as the creation of an environment conducive to change is known to depend upon leadership potential and the manner in which leaders steer the reform process. As Fullan (2006) argues, however, no transformation is possible without accompanying messiness. Handling such messiness in a manner that culminates in the achievement of objectives is really the task of leaders, and successful completion of this task depends upon the leaders' change knowledge, leadership skills and emotional intelligence (Fullan 1997; Combs, Miser & Whitaker 1999; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee 2002; Fullan, 2006).

In this study, leaders' perceptions of the changes taking place in higher education were explored in order to get a complete picture of the processes triggering successful and less successful change management. Exploration of such perceptions in a post-Soviet country like Armenia was judged to be particularly fruitful because changes in tertiary education have been under way for as long as two decades there. Previous studies of higher education policy diffusion and transfer from Western Europe to Armenia (Karakhanyan, *et al.*, 2011) and teachers' perceptions within this context (Karakhanyan, *et al.*, 2010), moreover, have pointed to mainly managerial and implementation flaws with teacher attribution of such flaws to the steering process.

To explore the leadership practices employed within the context of Armenian higher education, thus, the following questions were posed.

1. How do leaders perceive the challenges of implementing higher education reforms in Armenia?
2. How do leaders steer the process of reform implementation?
3. How do leaders perceive their role against the background of reform outcomes?

To answer these questions educational leaders' perceptions of policy diffusion and transfer, the extent of their change knowledge, their emotional intelligence, their leadership approaches and their causal attributions with regard to implementation outcomes were examined. More specifically, six higher education leaders (i.e., initiators of a reform process) were interviewed.

5.2 Context

The Republic of Armenia, like all other former Soviet republics, found itself in a period of flux after the Soviet regime collapse. Armenia had to handle the messiness that sudden independence brought with it (Heyneman, 2010) and, since the country's independence in the early 1990s, the Armenian government has reconsidered the country's higher education system and its role in the development of a democratic society in particular. In addition to such educational trends as increased use of technology, growing globalisation, expanding competition and greater accountability, Armenia has had to deal with the legacy of a communist regime — a legacy, which is deeply rooted in all aspects of Armenian life and thus Armenian culture, beliefs and values (Kozma & Polonyi, 2004; Zelvy, 2004). Coupled with the above is, unfortunately, the spread of corruption, which has only deepened over time and also damaged the reputation of higher education (Heyneman, 2010).

The higher education reform process was initiated in the early 1990s in Armenia long before the Bologna Declaration. Both managerial, curricular and student assessment policies were thus initially diffused and only slowly transmitted via pilot projects initiated on the part of a number of leading universities. In some cases, the reform activities were promoted by international projects supported by

the World Bank, Tempus, Open Society Institute and US Departments of State and Education — to name just a few. In most cases, financial support was spent on international consultancy as opposed to support for the local implementers and therefore not cost-effective.

The changes in Armenia and many other post-Soviet countries were aimed at reforming the entire education system. The elements typical for all former Soviet republics were structural changes, changed management approaches, curricular changes, modernisation and handling the boost in student demand for higher education (Heyneman, 2010). A lack of a clear vision (Zelvys, 2004), insufficient administrative capacity and a lack of guidance from the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) at the outset of the reform endeavour, however, resulted in considerable ambiguity with regard to what should be done, in what sequence, why and how. As a result, the complex process of change was reduced to merely technical conversions, and the content and culture of higher education in Armenia went untouched. The lack of carefully articulated approaches only brought about confusion among teachers and thereby resistance.

The situation in Armenia took a different turn after signing the Bologna Declaration in 2005 when priority was given to integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) via adherence to the principles of the Bologna Declaration. The MoES now took responsibility for educational reform in Armenia. The current approach is focused on broad involvement of the stakeholders, and special committees have thus been established to help steer the process (BFUG, Armenian Report, 2007). The revision of academic standards, development of a national qualifications framework, and quality assurance are currently on the government agenda.

The reforms being undertaken in higher education in Armenia are judged to be of very high importance and entail some fundamental changes needed to realise a knowledge-based society and European integration. Despite these positive impulses, the implementation measures taken by Armenian policymakers at both the national and institutional levels have only opened up further debate.

5.3 Theoretical framework

The following aspects of the educational leadership in Armenia will be examined in order to gain insight into the reform situation: policy diffusion and transfer, leadership approaches, change knowledge, emotional intelligence and causal attributions.

5.3.1 *Policy diffusion and transfer*

To understand the reforms derived from Western countries, it is useful to examine the concepts of policy diffusion and policy transfer within the Armenian context.

Policy transfer mainly stresses policy content and the role of agency in the transfer of ideas and practices from one time or space to another. Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 2000) identify two types of policy transfer: voluntary and coercive. The coercive type is further differentiated into direct and indirect transfer. Direct coercive transfer occurs when external powers create a condition obliging a state or an organisation to comply. The imposition of policy transfer on an entire country is rare, but international institutions can nevertheless play a key role in coercive policy transfer as is particularly the case for Third World countries seeking financial assistance from abroad. Indirect coercive transfer can arise from a variety of factors: externalities or functional interdependence between governments, technological change, global economic pressures and international consensus (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996, 2000).

In contrast, policy diffusion typically involves the emulation of policies and programs previously adopted by others (McLendon, 2003). In policy diffusion research, the focus is largely on the exploration of why some states adopt or adapt certain policies more readily than other states. The diffusion literature, for example, identifies two manners in which policy innovation can spread: vertically and horizontally. Vertical policy diffusion occurs when a national government sends clear signals regarding future actions and mandates, fiscal incentives and/or sanctions. Horizontal policy diffusion occurs when states consider and adopt policies similar to those in nearby states (Daun-Barnett & Perorazio, 2006).

Bache and Taylor (2003) have hypothesised three manners of reacting to external pressures: resistance, imitation and adaptation. *Resistance* can arise from a strong organisational or national identity, which foster protection of established values when perceived as threatened by external ideas or initiatives. *Imitation* can occur when an organisation is open to new manners of organisational design and new practices. *Adaptation* can occur at the conceptual level, the practice level or both. In order to demonstrate agreement with ideas and concepts which predominate in the world around, for example, an organisation may adapt at the conceptual level but not at the level of practice; nonetheless, as Bache and Taylor have pointed out, changes at a conceptual level can ultimately affect the level of practice (2003, p. 282). Adaptation, in particular, shows diffusion to be by far more complicated than the imitation hypothesis assumes (Bache & Olsson, 2001). In this study the concepts identified in the policy diffusion and transfer will be used to see how educational leaders perceive and experience the reforms.

5.3.2 Leadership approaches

As opposed to earlier perceptions of leadership as a position of authority within a given social structure, leadership is now perceived as an activity (Heifetz, 2000). In line with Heifetz's idea, Spillane *et al.* (2001) adopt a distributed view of leadership with a focus on the daily activities of leaders (e.g., meetings, workshops, trainings, discussions) and tools they use to steer and lead (e.g., documents, resources, methods). Both macro large-scale organisational activities and micro day-to-day activities are considered crucial for understanding the impact of leadership on reform efforts. Of particular importance are the micro tasks and activities as these are the nitty-gritty of leadership - the *how* of leadership. Understanding the micro activities of leaders and the links of these activities to macro activities will, moreover, reveal leadership practices that elicit effective instructional and educational change. A distributive perspective on leadership, as Spillane *et al.* put it, 'can help leaders identify dimensions of their practice, articulate relations among these dimensions, and think about changing their practice' (2001, p. 27). Moreover, if expertise is distributed, then the whole organisation rather than

the individual leader will be engaged in the practice of thinking about leadership expertise, bringing about actual implementer motivation and, therefore, practical adaptation.

Applying this perspective to higher education, Bolden *et al.* (2009) identify two principle approaches to the distribution of leadership: 'devolved' leadership which is associated with top-down influence and 'emergent' leadership which is associated with bottom-up and horizontal influence. According to these authors, the literature on distributed leadership emphasises an 'emergent' approach, but a 'devolved' approach is equally important within the context of higher educational reform. A combination of the two is crucial as such issues as collegiality versus managerialism should be considered to avoid dilemmas (Bolden *et al.* 2008a, Gosling *et al.* 2009). As Gosling *et al.* suggest, the concept of 'distributed leadership', with both emergent and devolved elements, ameliorates two contradictions in the experiences of academics, who take on managerial roles to some extent. As they elaborate on contradictions, "first, it may help to make sense of a contrast between their experience of leadership and their sense of what it should be; second, it helps to mediate conflicts in the identity-work of being an academic and a manager" (2009, p. 299). Considered in the wider context of changes in the cultures of universities, however, 'distributed leadership' may conceal a concentration of influence among those who control the budgets, threats to traditional means of upward communication, and a predominance of academic leadership (Gosling *et al.*, 2009). Bolden *et al.*'s (2008a) research demonstrates that '[higher education] leadership requires a combination of both shared and hierarchical leadership' (p. 45).

The notion of 'distributed leadership' is, in any case, useful for understanding change. In the present study, the activities pursued by leaders and the tools they use to steer the change process will be explored in order to gain greater insight into how they steer changes. To what extent do the leadership tools employed appear to constrain or enable reform processes?

5.3.3 Change knowledge

To understand the manner in which leaders steer a reform process, it is also crucial that the extent of their change knowledge be examined and thereby insight gained into how this knowledge enables them to manage complex changes.

The driving force behind any type of change is an in-depth understanding of the concepts, processes, and values entailed as only a deep understanding allows one to appreciate and follow the change endeavour. Fullan (2004, 2007) defines change knowledge as insight into the change process and understanding the meaning of changes. The crux of change, according to Fullan, is how individuals come to grips with a new reality since eventually dilemmas are bound to arise because of underestimation of either the meaning or process of change. In order to make a reform successful, both the subjective and objective significance of the change process must be understood. The individual contexts of the reform implementers must be considered but also the broader social forces influencing the change process. As Fullan (2007) has observed, the most problematic aspect of a change process is bringing these two worlds together. Thus, according to Fullan and Scott (2009), the attribute of turnaround leadership is their change knowledge expressed by the leader's capacity to 'listen, link, and lead' and capitalise on 'modelling, teaching and learning' in turbulent times.

In reality, leaders who possess deep change knowledge and turnaround leadership attributes can focus on improving the learning experiences of all students and staff. They bring about the changes needed to achieve reform by igniting the interest, motivation and commitment of different groups (Fullan & Scott, 2009). Leaders who possess deep change knowledge can focus on the core components of the change process to learn, lead and stimulate change within their own universities in a cyclical manner. Fullan and Scott, for example, argue that a solid knowledge base is needed to stimulate and integrate a strong moral purpose and strong partnerships both inside and outside the academic institution.

To identify the extent of the educational leaders' change knowledge in the Armenian context, the present study will look at their capacity to learn within the change context, listen to the voices of key implementers and link what they have learned and heard to make meaningful and informed decisions.

5.3.4 Emotional intelligence

Studying leadership potential without attention to emotional intelligence runs the risk of overlooking the capacity of leaders to enter into authentic relationships or what emotional intelligence is all about (Shankman & Allen, 2008, p. xi). Recent studies in the field of emotional intelligence have indeed highlighted its role in leadership practices and the contribution it can make to the vitality of an organisation and the organisation's overall performance (Fullan 1997; Combs, Miser & Whitaker 1999; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee 2002). Goleman *et al.* (2002) found leaders, who are emotionally competent, to be able to accurately assess and express emotions for both themselves and others, successfully manage emotions within relationships and integrate emotions with other cognitive processes to solve problems. Emotionally intelligent leaders also have accurate perceptions of both human behaviour and organisational behaviour. On the basis of what they perceive, emotionally intelligent leaders then design the approaches needed to solve a problem. The research of Goleman *et al.* also shows a leader's emotional state and actions to clearly affect the feelings, behaviour and performance of those they lead.

Emotionally intelligent leaders show an awareness of three fundamental facets of the leadership dynamic: context, self and others (Beatty, 2000; Shankman & Allen, 2008). Awareness of the *context* is expressed, according to Shankman and Allen, as leadership savvy and an ability to understand various situations and networks within an organisation. Awareness of the *self* is expressed as insight into one's abilities and emotions: emotional self-perception, honest self-understanding, healthy self-esteem, emotional self-control, authenticity, flexibility, personal standards, optimism and initiative contribute to understanding the self of the leaders. Awareness of *others* is expressed as insight into one's own relationships

and the role of these in the leadership equation. Such qualities as empathy, inspiration, influence, coaching, change agency, conflict management, creation of connections, teamwork and an ability to build on the assets of others indicate emotional intelligence.

As Caruso (2003) describes it, emotional intelligence on the part of leaders also entails using the different facets of leadership to influence their own thinking, understand the underlying causes of emotions and determine the potential for change. Based on the results, the emotionally intelligent leaders “manage with emotions by integrating the wisdom of these feelings into [their] thinking, decision-making, and actions” (p. 7).

These very facets and processes will be used in this study to explore the extent of the leaders’ emotional intelligence. Most particularly, this study will look at their emotional experience in the daily professional environment to understand their actions and the impact of the latter on the reform implementation.

5.3.5 Attributions

To explore how leaders perceive their role within a context of reform/change, Weiner’s (1992, 2000, 2008) attribution theory and consideration of the most important factors affecting attributions — namely, ability, effort, task difficulty and luck — will be of use. The basic principle underlying attribution theory is that the individual’s own perceptions or attributions with regard to the probability of success or failure will determine the amount of effort expended on an activity in the future (i.e., motivation). The theory emphasises the idea that agents are strongly motivated by the pleasant outcome of being able to feel good about themselves. Another important principle is that people will interpret the environment in a manner that allows them to maintain a positive self-image. In other words, people attribute successes and failures to factors, which will allow them to feel as good as possible about themselves. When they succeed at something, thus, they tend to attribute this success to their own efforts and abilities. When they fail, they try to blame other factors — factors, which they cannot control (Weiner, 1992, 2000).

In order to better understand the motivational consequences of causal beliefs, Weiner argues that the qualitative differences between causes such as effort and ability can be transformed into quantitative differences. This can only be done when causal attributions (i.e., beliefs) are analyzed in terms of some specific psychological dimensions. Weiner's (2000) research has documented three core dimensions of causal beliefs: (1) locus of control for causes (internal vs. external), (2) stability of causes over time or not, and (3) controllability (skill vs. luck, actions of others, etc.). Eight types of causal beliefs or attributions are the result: (1) internal controllable, (2) external controllable, (3) internal non-controllable, (4) external non-controllable, (5) internal stable, (6) external stable, (7) internal unstable and (8) external unstable.

Within the context of higher education reforms, studying the attributions of change leaders should help us understand how they perceive their leadership roles within the context of reform.

5.3.6 The analytic framework for the present study

If we integrate the aspects of leadership reviewed above (i.e., policy diffusion and transfer, leadership approaches, change knowledge, emotional intelligence and attributions) into an analytic framework as depicted in Figure 5.1, then insight can be gained into the educational reform situation in Armenia.

In any case of policy diffusion and transfer, the context into which the reform is planted and the capacity of leaders to manage the reform situation can lead to two extreme possible scenarios. In Scenario A, there is change knowledge on the part of the leaders and a cyclical approach to the context of change is adopted; there is an ability to engage in activities and use tools which lead to a delegation of authority to the actual implementers of the reform; and teacher motivation to reform is very high. Deep change knowledge also results in leaders learning about the context, the self and others — which are attributes of emotional intelligence. And this learning influences the way in which the leaders think, their decision-

making, their activities and their choice of management tools. Such leadership learning is also likely to generate an active dialogue with the owners of a change and thereby their deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms of change and greater ownership of the change process. Such conditions can lead to the internalisation of reforms by the implementers and thus changes of behaviour, adaptation of innovative approaches for use in actual practice and internal attributions of success.

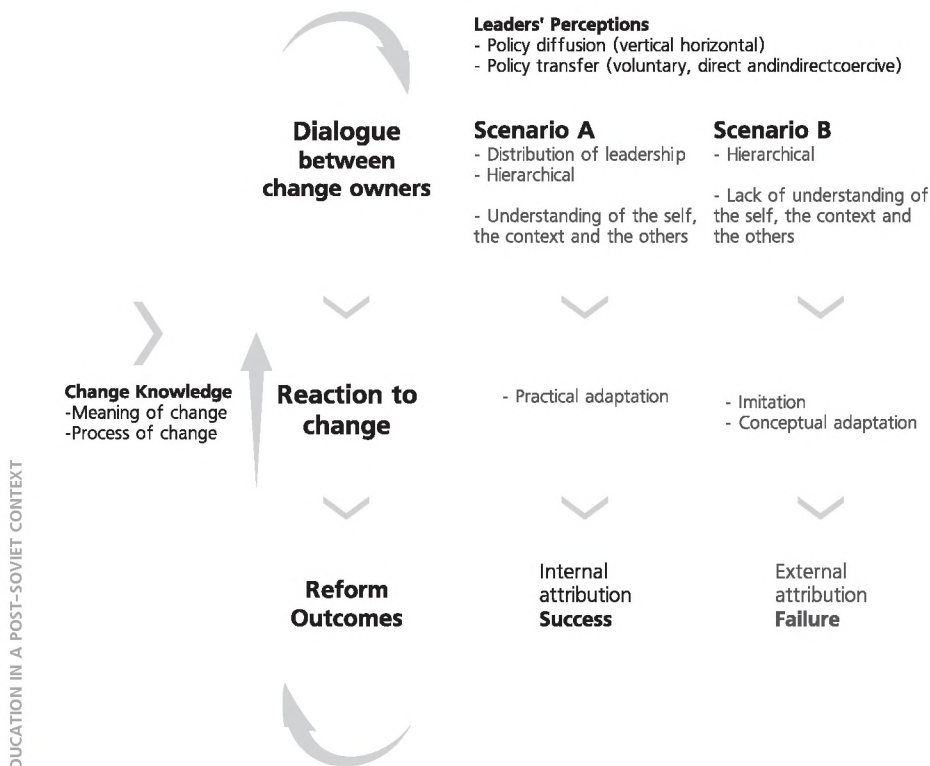


Figure 5.1: An analytic framework for leaders' perceptions analysis

In Scenario B, where change knowledge and the adoption of a cyclic approach to

the implementation of reforms do not stand out and only a minimal understanding of the context, self and others is present at best, leaders may *impose* changes with their activities and choice of management tools. Such an approach may halt any active dialogue between leaders and the owners of change with only imitation, conceptual - but not practical - adaptation and/or the distortion of reforms as a result. Outcomes, which are not internalised will be a result. And the attribution of outcomes to only external factors and thereby failure of the reform will be the result.

5.4 Methods

5.4.1 Procedure

As a follow-up on a previous enquiry into teacher perceptions of the reforms unfolding in Armenian higher education (Karakhanyan, *et al.*, 2010, 2011), six reform initiators were next interviewed. The purpose of this enquiry was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the context for the relevant reform efforts. The focus was on gaining insight into the perceptions of those steering reform efforts, the context of the reform efforts, the processes underlying the reform efforts and the manner in which the reform efforts are implemented and guided.

5.4.2 Participants

The interviews took place in Yerevan, Armenia in the summer of 2009. The respondents came from the MoES and three major universities, which were among the first to initiate higher educational reform in Armenia. The interviewees had different backgrounds in terms of exposure to Soviet versus Western cultures. For confidentiality reasons fictitious names have been used further.

5.4.3 Interviews

The interview questions were derived from the literature, the results of a larger survey conducted in 2008 (Karakhanyan, *et al.*, 2010) and the interviews conducted with teachers involved in reform efforts in 2008-2009.

Six interviews were conducted, and they all involved standard introductory questions followed by clarification questions, discussion and sometimes explanation of concepts by the interviewer and the interviewee. With the aim of also revealing any concerns on the part of the interviewees, they were also invited to elaborate on anything else they deemed relevant. The duration of the interviews varied from 1 hour and 35 minutes to 1 hour and 55 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the Armenian language and later translated into English. During each interview as well as afterwards, notes were taken by the interviewer to indicate emotions of the leaders, record impressions of the interview process and the openness of the respondents, and offer suggestions to improve the interview questions. Particularly strong points made in the interviews were also noted.

All of the interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and sent to the interviewees for authorisation. All interviewees acknowledged receipt of the transcripts and agreed with the content.

5.5 Analysis

In what Charmaz (2000) calls a logical-deductive approach, the interview transcripts were coded using the system developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) for the analysis of qualitative data and the ATLAS.ti 5.5 (2004) software. The coding of the transcripts was thus based on concepts derived from different sources as well as free coding in order to capture new concepts.

All of the interviews were coded by one of the researchers involved in this study.

The researcher first assigned descriptive codes to those interview segments, which concerned the research questions and were derived from the literature studied taking the concepts in the theoretical framework as a basis. This produced a total of 336 codes. Discussion of the codes between the researchers was undertaken next and, when agreement on a code was not apparent, the discussion continued until consensus could be achieved.

Families of codes were next identified in order to summarise the data on the relevant interview segments. The families of codes were then categorised according to the target concepts stemming from the research questions.

To examine the reliability of the coding, both intra- and inter-rater reliability tests were conducted on a random selection of 65 interview segments using SPSS software. The intra-rater reliability was determined by recoding the randomly selected segments after a three-week period and found to be .98 (Cohen's kappa). To examine the inter-rater reliability of the coding process, another researcher coded a sample of 65 interview segments; this revealed an inter-rater reliability of .85 (Cohen's kappa). The observed coding disagreements appeared to be due to the different cultural backgrounds of those doing the coding and thus their understanding of what was said in the interview segment.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the data, eliminate irrelevant information, create focus and organise the information in a cogent manner, a summary data matrix was created for each target concept (i.e., families of codes related to particular research questions) and each respondent (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each matrix was first analysed separately and then compared to the others. Finally, an output summary with references to the written transcripts, coded segments, family of codes and matrices was formulated.

5.6 Results

5.6.1 Perceived challenges of reform implementation

To answer the first research question which concerned *leaders' perceptions of the challenges of implementing higher education reforms in Armenia*, the concepts of policy diffusion and transfer were of particular interest. Although the leaders emphasised different aspects of the change process in their interviews, all six had very similar responses with regard to policy diffusion and transfer.

According to all of the leaders, the changes being undertaken in Armenian higher education have been prompted by two major factors: the collapse of the Soviet regime and trends towards globalisation. The leaders' perceptions revealed both horizontal and vertical diffusion of policy. With the fall of the Soviet regime, that is, Armenia was free to consider adoption of policies used to promote internationalisation in western countries or, in other words, horizontal policy diffusion. Following the Bologna Declaration, which is aimed at the establishment of clearly compatible academic quality and degree standards throughout Europe, the national government influenced policy by sending signals with regard to the future and issuing mandates, fiscal incentives and sanctions; vertical diffusion, thus.

Petros: *First the Ministry was not really involved in the change process... Western models encouraged us to make the reforms, particularly the USA, since we initially followed the American model... After Bologna, we started receiving decrees with regard to what to do. But we were already ready since we had already initiated the process long before.*

Regarding the Bologna process, in particular, most of the leaders mentioned imposition of change without a deep understanding of the underlying processes, without analyses of the potential impact on higher education, at an overly fast pace and with insufficient preparation.

Interviewer: *Can we conclude that the universities started taking part in the Bologna process because they saw the need to?*

Robert: *No, they started because they were made to.*

Interviewer: *And the Ministry?*

Robert: *Yes, the same. The Ministry started when they saw the money flow and then made the institutions make the changes. But if you ask the Ministry, they will say that 'they saw the need'... If you gather the teachers and ask them whether they are happy with the credit system, they will say 'no.' No more than 10% will say 'yes.' No, we definitely made a mistake switching over to a credit system without any preparation.*

Regarding policy transfer, both voluntary and indirect (as opposed to direct) coercive methods were mentioned. Voluntary policy transfer occurred after the collapse of the Soviet regime when individual managers sought to improve their universities and integrate into the international academic community. Indirect coercive policy transfer occurred in response to a variety of external factors including technological change, globalisation trends and - later - integration into the European Higher Education Area. All of these factors prompted, if not required, policy transfer.

Vigen: *The reason for the change was the need to establish a new liberal economy, production of graduates with new qualifications and capable of functioning in the new environment, new trends in development and globalisation, integration into the international education system.*

Voluntary policy transfer was reflected by the leaders' zeal to see changes happen and the motivation of their universities to become more visible at an international level. A pattern of initiation of changes at the level of the institution by individual top managers in the early 1990s thus revealed itself.

Artem: *The reforms started long before the Bologna process and were prompted by our Rector being extremely well-informed. He had a lot of experience in both the USA and Europe... It was not a system; it was based on the initiative of some individuals.*

Indirect imposition of reforms (i.e., indirect coercive policy transfer) was also evidenced by bringing in international experts who — in the eyes of the leaders interviewed in the present study — hardly cared about the job they were being called upon to do or the consequences during the reform process.

Robert: *No research was undertaken at the outset. All that was done in the form of preparation was to invite international experts. So, what happened...a lousy specialist from Lithuania or some other middle or lower level specialists came over to propose something, make money and leave.*

With regard to reaction to change and the course of policy diffusion, resistance on the part of those university managements not leading the process of reform in particular and the teachers in general is reported. Later on, as a result of joining the Bologna process, imitation is reported. That is, universities initially not involved in the reform process later started imitating the practices of the leading universities. In the end, conceptual adaptation was observed, driven by a desire to demonstrate compliance with international standards. Universities adapted policies at a conceptual level, but these policies did not get internalised by the owners of change and therefore did not find adaptation for actual practice or integration into actual practice.

Vigen: *We had resistance at different levels. First, we did not have support from other universities, including the [major one], from different levels of teachers, but we had a high rating ... Then, the Bologna process was initiated in 1999 and, as it turned out, all our undertakings were supported at the European level. And little by little, other universities started to join us. Then the reforms unfolded at the level of the Ministry and spread to*

other universities, but this was done superficially. We had only structural changes, as a reaction to international changes.

5.6.2 Managing the complexities of change

To answer the second research question, namely *how leaders steer the process of reform implementation*, the following leadership aspects were considered: change knowledge, activities and tools used, and emotional intelligence.

One of the major findings of this study is an absence of *change knowledge* and the incapacity of policymakers and leaders to steer the reform implementation process. As already shown, reform policies were mostly diffused and transferred without a deep analysis of the relevant context and applicability of the policies to the local culture.

Ruben: *The main idea was to orient ourselves towards a western type of education. I think, in principle, that the agreements were signed without thinking about their impact in the beginning; the steps to be taken were not analysed.*

The leaders' comments about the reform concepts, processes and values indeed revealed a lack of change knowledge at the outset of the reforms, which resulted in merely technical conversions. Lack of insight into how to start the reform process most effectively resulted in the adoption of reforms, which failed to take account of Armenian culture and values, which are clearly cherished by those responsible for actual implementation. Such an approach was actually found to *prevent* staff involvement in the end.

Vigen: *The Ministry demands reforms, imitated or not, but has no capacity to handle them [the reforms] themselves. All of the universities state that they have now switched to a credit system, but they do not know what the objectives of such a system are, what they are up to. They continue to mix concepts up.*

Another major finding was a clear incapacity to manage the universities within the context of reform. The introduction of democratic approaches to university management represented a radical departure from centralised political control and governance. Decentralisation and the adoption of a new management paradigm confronted the university leaders with the tasks of in-depth learning in context, modelling and implementing changes on their own.

Edmund: *We were not used to developments, we used to receive everything from Moscow and then make adjustments. After the collapse, we were supposed to handle our own development, but we did not have the capacity or skills to do so. We lacked people with a capacity to develop standards; we did not have the experience to do it. It would be wrong to say we do not have them now, because we do, but this is characteristic of only a very few.*

Ruben: *Bologna is at a declarative level; I believe any decision should have mechanisms for implementation. We have the Declaration, but have no idea how to implement it. It is not the right approach; we need a systemic approach. We always have to answer the question of how to do it — how and via whom we should do things.*

The leaders appeared to recognise the necessity of change knowledge (i.e., understanding the changes to be implemented and the best approach to be taken for implementation), but very few steps were actually undertaken to learn about the management of complex reform processes. This insight emerged while exploring the extent to which the leaders listened to the voices of the direct implementers of the reforms, namely the teachers. The role of the teachers in the change process was also not taken seriously by most of the leaders who actually blamed the teachers for not having the necessary capacities to get actively involved in the reforms.

Artem: *At this stage, since the process is quite a new one, they are not involved [...] because they do not have the right capacities. I have to admit, unfortunately, that not only the teaching staff but also the important administrative circles were not involved.*

The nature of the *activities* and the *tools* employed by the six leaders stemmed mainly from their rich experiences with the Soviet regime. Each interviewee appeared to view reform implementation to require top-down meetings, formal discussions, superficial trainings and workshops. The use of such tools as top-down decrees and formal documentation of change processes reflect the direct imposition of reforms without deep learning or attention to the actual context.

Vigen: *The decisions reached the teachers through our Academic Council, then we established a Board of Trustees, we had very influential people.*

Interviewer: *How were the changes made?*

Vigen: *From the top level; from my office. I organised meetings at the highest administrative level, we had reform groups and these groups disseminated the information at the Chair and department levels. And based upon the decrees, appropriate changes were made...*

Robert: *I issued decrees and the staff was obliged to follow them.*

Attention to the professional development of teachers was also largely missing, and the few opportunities they were given were limited to non-coherent, incidental and fragmented trainings. Incidental participation in international projects was reported, but this little impact on the implementation of the reforms in general and the development of the necessary curricula in particular was also reported.

Vigen: *No, the teachers did not get involved. All they had was involvement in international projects, which were fragmented and not coherent because they addressed different topics.*

Ruben: *[Professional development] is totally absent nowadays. We used to have great opportunities for 5 or 6 months of professional development for teachers, even we had opportunities to have them in Moscow. We do not have this now. We have had no professional development for many years... Recently they have started to do it locally, but it does not have a national character, thus.*

In the domain of *emotional intelligence*, the leaders' knowledge of the context, self and others was considered in addition to how this knowledge was integrated into their thinking, decision-making and actions (Caruso, 2003). The overall pattern was some awareness and knowledge of themselves but a lack of such for the context and others. The leaders demonstrated optimism, initiative and a drive to improve according to personal standards. Such qualities as emotional self-perception, reflection on own strengths and weaknesses, healthy self-esteem, emotional self-control, authenticity and flexibility were not apparent.

Petros: *I really enjoy it. I have been enjoying the process. I am, by nature, a person who always tries to come up with new ideas and implement them. I would not say that I was really frustrated by the process, as I am a realist by nature and I think whatever takes place is a natural process. With regard to the reforms, I did it because I had to, to feel better, to feel fit. Without that it would have been more difficult. I just got involved because I was interested; I felt a need for that.*

The leaders failed to gain knowledge of the specific context or examine the situation and organisational networks to inform the implementation process.

Petros: *Nobody tried to understand what it is was that we needed to change and how we were going to do that. All we knew was that we could no longer work with the old standards... but how to manage the new way remained a challenge.*

With regard to an awareness or knowledge of others, few steps were taken to inspire those being led, to coach, to influence or to build capacity and thereby create a team. Furthermore, during the interviews none of the leaders demonstrated an ability to encourage others to work together or other to search for new directions. Such qualities as conflict management and building upon the assets of others were not reported, let alone incorporation of insights with regard to the self, context and others into decision-making and actions. Of the six leaders, only one explicitly expressed some empathy with regard to the teachers.

Ruben: *I feel pain for the teachers... At the end of the day, the actual implementer is the teacher through whom we can get to our [goals]. No matter how good our decisions or mechanisms are, everything comes to the end-point at which the teacher stands, the quality depends on them. And what do [the leaders] do to create incentives for their [teachers'] involvement? What we witness is indifference to the teachers and a real lack of appreciation for the job they are doing, also reflected in their salaries. Once, students dreamt of becoming a teacher; now, hardly anyone wants to do this.*

5.6.3 Perceived leadership role in relation to reform outcomes

The third research question, which concerns the leaders' perceptions of their role in relation to the reform outcomes, was analysed in terms of attributions. As Table 5.1 shows, a strong causal attribution of the reform outcomes to uncontrollable external factors manifested itself in all six of the interviews. The leaders attributed the poor reform outcomes and problems encountered to mainly the government, the teachers, the students and society at large.

Table 5.1: Causal attribution

Cause	Internal	External	Total
Controllable	9	7	16
Non-controllable	4	108	112
Stable	4	21	25
Unstable	9	94	103
Total	26	230	256

To a larger extent (57 codes), the government was blamed for not having the required capacity to implement the reforms, for indifference and for the adoption of a superficial approach. A major concern was that the implementation process was badly organised and did not have strategic or systematic character. The reasons for this situation, according to the leaders, was the complexity of the post-war transition period in which the government was mainly concerned with the political situation in Armenia.

Artem: *I do not know whether to consider it a positive or negative shift, but the government at that time was not at all interested in the development of higher education and was also not competent enough for this. Being indifferent, they did not therefore put up any barriers to the initiative coming from the universities... All they did was, not for the sake of quality, but for the sake of keeping track of things. They did not take any steps to more carefully scrutinise the reform efforts or implement them in a more organised and systematic manner.*

The teachers (32 codes) were also blamed because, as the leaders explained, they were more concerned with their socio-economic problems and therefore did not demonstrate enough interest in the reform process. The teachers' lack of motivation, lack of capacity, lack of desire to learn and lack of interest in the reform process was repeatedly emphasised.

Vigen: *Currently, they do not have a joint aim or problem to express because of their socio-economic status. They do not have enough capacity to be involved... Teachers' voices is a mirage. During our meetings they come up with pathetic statements, like our government should retire, they are bad and we are good, students do not learn...nothing constructive.*

The students (7 codes) were perceived to be lackadaisical. Society at large (12 codes) was blamed for not dignifying the mission of learning in general and teaching in particular. Widespread corruption was also stated to be one of the major evils of Armenian society.

Ruben: *I would call this [an issue of] the national defence policy. Will anybody risk accusing a person from the judicial bodies [of corruption]? Nobody. Do you think that teachers are more corrupt? No, they are just more defenceless. They are really poor teachers who can be blamed by everybody. Has anybody asked about who has corrupted the teachers? Why they are being bribed? It is like offering a starving person food; do you really think he's going to reject it? We simply do not try to join efforts to fight.*

All of the respondents stated disappointment and frustration with the lack of attention to education.

Vigen: *Of course I am disappointed since I haven't achieved the vision I had. I have made the changes as much as I could but the changes I undertook might have had a broader impact... at this moment I am disappointed since we still do not have educational policy at the national level, education is not among their priorities; if they say it is, then this is just a declaration. I see that the development gradient is not positive; I do not have any great expectations.*

5.7 Conclusions and discussion

The major aim of this study was to gain insight into leaders' perceptions of educational reforms, their roles in the reform process and their actions. The context of the study was the Armenian higher education system and the reforms that have taken place during the past two decades. Despite the zeal of the leaders to see change happen, Scenario B as envisioned in the analytic framework (Figure 5.2) appears to hold; that is, failure. In fact, degradation of values, which people have cherished for decades appears to have occurred (Karakhanyan, *et al.*, 2010,2011).

The major reasons for such failure can be summarised as a lack of dialogue with the stakeholders and insufficient change knowledge. The role of leaders at national and institutional levels, the extent of their emotional intelligence, the manner in which they have guided (or not guided) the change process and the environment, which they have created in their organisations also all played a role.

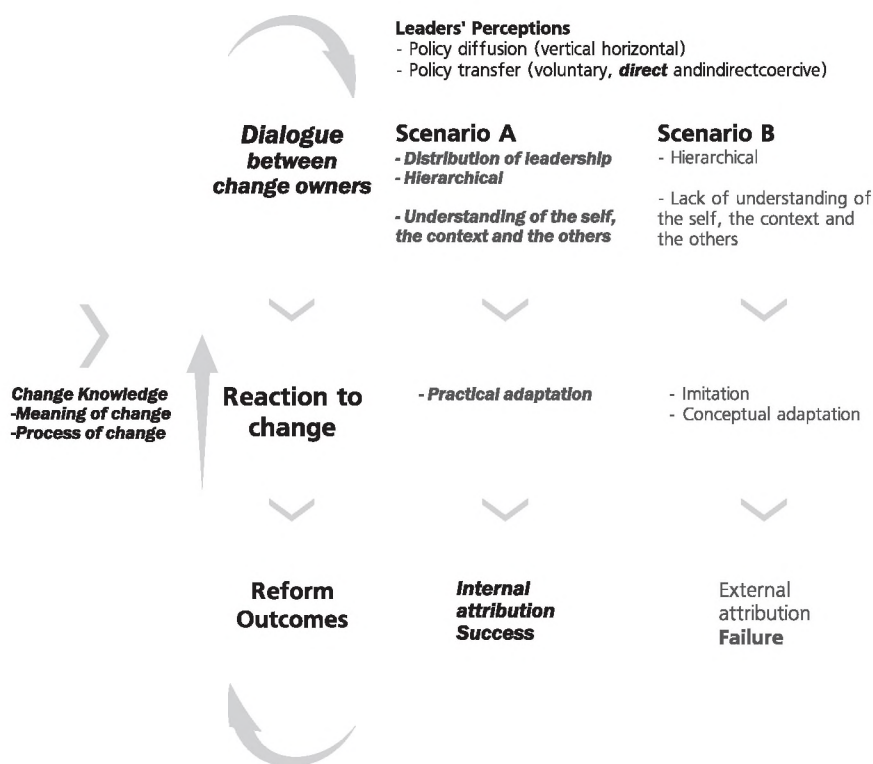


Figure 5.2: An analytic framework for leaders' perceptions analysis¹

A lack of change knowledge at all levels of reform implementation and a failure to adopt a cyclical approach to the design and implementation of reforms resulted in an incapacity on the part of leaders to understand the situation undergoing change, explore and build upon available capacities or lead those pivotal to the success of a reform. Instead of careful examination of the context and preparatory research for the implementation of policy, which could have involved key players in the reform process right from the beginning, quick fix changes were opted for. Superficial alterations were made and, in most cases, international consultancy was drawn upon to do this, which was not cost-effective.

¹ The elements missing in the Armenian case are indicated in bold and italic.

Two tendencies stand out in particular: the occurrence of a bottom-up approach at the national level of reform and a top-down approach at the institutional level of reform. The national approach was bottom-up because it was initiated by the institutions and not the government. If it had been supported by the government through a constructive guidance, it could have initiated a change dialogue leading to success. But this did not occur as the government was concerned with the political and economic hardships of the country at the time and therefore paid insufficient attention to educational developments.

At the institutional level, in turn, the modes of operation were mainly top-down with little involvement of the actual implementers. As already noted, top-down leadership is not always the wrong approach and may certainly be called for at times. What the results of the current study suggest, however, is that regardless of the nature of the reform process and leadership (i.e., top-down or bottom-up), the reform process is destined to fail if an active dialogue between the agents of change, change knowledge and involvement of the implementers of change are neglected.

A lack of knowledge with regard to innovative leadership and the activities and tools, which this entails, clearly resulted in the imposition of changes, with little motivation to adhere to the changes as a result. As a consequence, the initiated changes resulted in resistance, which later became imitation and brought about conceptual adaptation but not adaptation into actual practice. Contrary to what Bache and Taylor (2003) have argued, thus, practical adaptation did not emerge from conceptual adaptation and thus affect people's behaviour or lead to real (i.e., internalised) change.

The leaders appeared to concentrate on mostly themselves. Attention to others or

the context was virtually nonexistent. Only one leader expressed some sympathy for the current status of teachers. This shows few of the leaders to appreciate the role of teachers (i.e., agency) in the educational reform process and how critical their involvement is. A lack of emotional intelligence appeared to prevent the leaders from developing accurate perceptions of both human and organisational behaviour. Otherwise, it would have enabled them, as Caruso (2003) puts it, to manage with emotions by integrating the wisdom of these feelings into their thinking, decision-making, and actions thus leading to a design of more adequate approaches for educational reforms.

The prevalence of uncontrollable external factors in the leaders' attributions with regard to the failed change outcomes attests to their lack of ownership for the reform process and outcomes of the reform process. The leaders expressed disappointment and frustration at not being able to achieve the vision formulated decades prior. This failure was attributed to a lack of social and financial capital, and the leaders tended to blame the teachers, the government, the students and the society at large.

These findings are striking in light of the results regarding teacher perceptions of the reform processes and attributions with regard to the failure of the reform efforts (Karakhanyan, *et al.*, 2010, 2011). What the teachers and leaders share is an initially positive attitude towards the reforms and a desire to see improvement. However, for different reasons, they blame each other for the failures. In both studies, the owners of change showed a lack of change knowledge. Not wanting to slow the change process down with careful consideration of the local situation and clear articulation of objectives, moreover, the change leaders ironically slowed the change process down with flawed implementation efforts (Fullan, 2004). These findings indicate the urgency of some dialogue and real change based upon shared knowledge, perceptions and attributions.

- **General Conclusions
and Discussion**

CHAPTER

6



• General Conclusions and Discussion

6.1 Main findings

The main aim of this research was to gain insight into the nature and quality of the higher education reform implementation in Armenia. In particular, an example of policy diffusion and transfer from developed to developing countries was examined together with the success of reform implementation from the perspectives of the actual implementers, namely the higher education teachers and their leaders. In this final chapter, the conclusions with regard to the three research questions are presented and discussed with the aid of the analytic framework developed for purposes of this research. Thereafter, the theoretical and practical implications of the conclusions, the strengths and limitations of the whole research project and some suggestions for further research will be presented.

Research question one: *How can the nature and quality of the reforms undertaken in Armenian higher education be understood within the context of the Bologna process and against a background of theories of successful educational change?*

The first research question was explored in Chapter Two. To start with and understand the nature of the Armenian higher education reforms, a review of the relevant policy and educational change literatures was undertaken and a tentative analytic framework for understanding educational change was developed (see Figure 6.1). The final analytic framework used to answer the first research question was developed throughout the course of this research project and therefore differs from the initial analytic framework (i.e., that presented in Chapter Two). Such key concepts as policy diffusion and transfer were added to the concepts of change knowledge, dialogue, reaction to change and reform outcome, for example. Next, a policy document analysis was undertaken in order to examine the Armenian reform rhetoric in terms of the analytic framework we developed. Thereafter, the responses to two open-ended questions presented

as part of a larger survey conducted within the context of this research were analysed to gain insight into the nature and quality of the reforms undertaken in Armenian higher education.

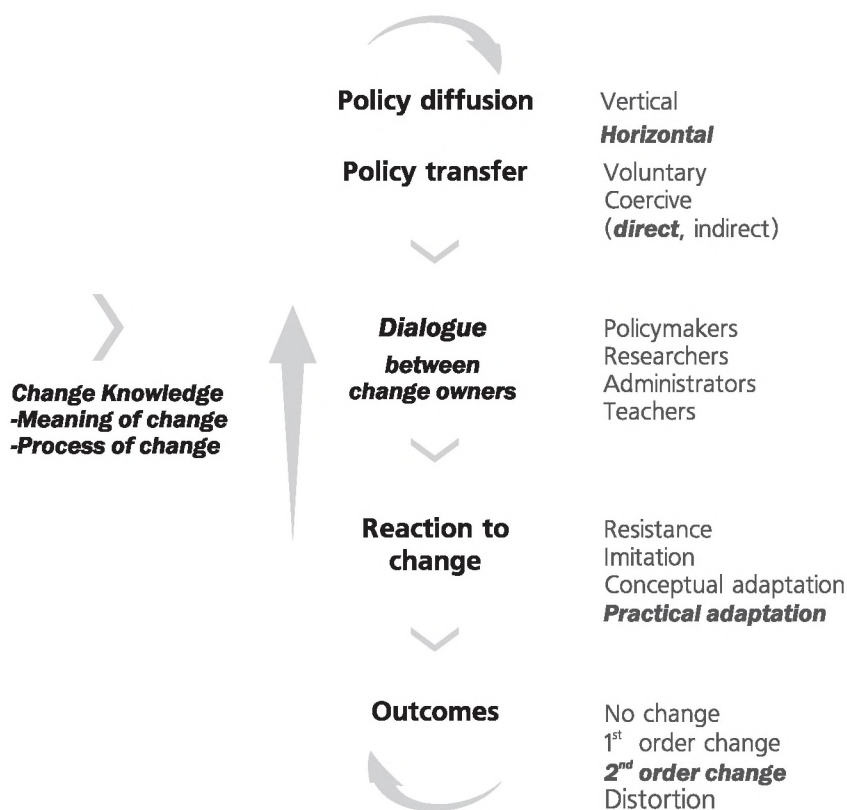


Figure 6.1: Analytic framework for understanding educational change: The case of Armenia¹

When the changes taking place in Armenian higher education were examined in terms of the analytic framework, the following components appeared to be lacking: change knowledge, a holistic and thus cyclical approach to reform implementation, dialogue between the change owners, practical adaptation of

¹ The elements missing in the Armenian case are indicated in bold and italic.

the reforms and deeper second-order changes. Those elements characterised in the literature as the driving forces behind educational change were largely missing.

The policy diffusion from Western countries to higher education in a post-Soviet country occurred in a mostly vertical manner (i.e., via declarations and mandates). The nature of the observed policy transfer was both directly and indirectly coercive. Direct coercive methods were particularly apparent in the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when international organisations endeavoured to transfer those ideologies and higher education policies, which characterise a democratic society. This was done mostly via the provision of financial assistance in the form of international expert missions. Indirect coercive transfer methods became apparent when global economic pressures, technological changes and the 2005 joining of the Bologna Process by Armenia came into play.

At the level of implementation, a lack of dialogue with the potential owners of the educational changes was clearly apparent. Changes were imposed in isolation from the actual implementers. Such an approach gave rise to opposition and certainly did not lead to internalisation of the desired reforms. The findings show the types of changes on the policymakers' agendas to indeed be mainly top-down and entail mostly first-order changes aimed at restructuring the system with little or no second-order changes as a result. Even the first-order changes turned out to be highly superficial, however, because the educational administrations were striving to preserve their positions and authority. Superficial changes for the sake of a report to deliver to the governing bodies was thus the outcome with no deeper learning within the context targeted for change. In their desire to avoid having the time-consuming process of building on existing change knowledge slow them down, thus, the administrators actually slowed the change process, which at the end resulted in implementation flaws (Fullan, 2004).

This situation appears to have given rise to one of the major findings in this research, namely the widespread attribution of the observed reform failures by the teachers to strictly external and largely uncontrollable factors. Such attributions indicate a lack of teacher ownership for the reform process. Successful change and reform ownership requires a significant degree of consistency between the perceptions of teachers and the desired reforms, but this was not found to be the case in context of Armenian higher education.

Only conceptual adaptation appears to have occurred. Given the top-down imposition of the reforms, the desired changes are accepted at a conceptual level but not found to affect practice in a positive manner. Both the traditional and innovative approaches appear, in fact, to have been distorted as a result. Depriving teachers of the values they have cherished for many, many years, the new system failed to substitute the value with other valid values and thereby elicit trust on the part of teachers and a motivation to change. What is still lacking in the end, thus, is the main driving force for reform, namely the requisite change knowledge. Aimed at making quick changes and thereby gaining recognition at an international level, policymakers clearly missed the importance of providing profound learning experiences within the context targeted for change and thereby the necessary capacity for change. Attention to such, would have prompted much greater attention to how those responsible for the actual implementation of the changes perceived the reform process or our second research question.

Research question two: *What are the perceptions of higher education teachers in Armenia within the context of reforms?*

In Chapters Three and Four, we explored the perceptions of those actually responsible for the implementation of the reforms, namely the university teachers. The empirical data come from the survey conducted at eight leading universities in Armenia, on the one hand, and interviews held with three groups of teachers with different orientations towards the reforms, on the other hand. First, we adapted the analytic framework developed in the previous study to include

elements, which are known to shape teachers' reform perceptions and thereby the outcomes of reform efforts. Information on the organisational culture, teacher beliefs regarding the reforms, teacher emotions within the context of change and causal attributions regarding the reform outcomes is now included. The elements in the framework can now indicate the scenarios of successful reform (A) or failed reform (B). Second, the teachers' perceptions were analysed in greater detail by identifying three groups of teachers for 12 in-depth interviews: teachers with a negative, positive or neutral orientation towards the reforms. Their change knowledge, perceptions of the organisational culture, beliefs about the reforms, attitudes towards the reforms, emotions within the change context and causal attributions with regard to the reform outcomes were then analysed.

The results show the element of utmost importance for successful reform implementation, namely teachers' change knowledge, to be largely superficial and therefore provide a poor foundation for the actual implementation of reforms and cyclic learning within the target context. Neither the subjective nor the objective significance of the reforms was understood sufficiently by the teachers as the reform leaders made no attempt whatsoever to build upon the knowledge of the actual implementers.

Regarding the organisational culture, the environment at the institutions turned out to not be conducive to change. In fact, the predominant culture at the universities was found to have a profoundly negative effect on the universities' capacity to engage and implement the necessary changes (Fullan & Scott, 2009). Underestimation of the importance of teacher ownership and agency in the design and implementation of the reforms produced little congruence between the teachers' beliefs about the reforms and the reforms themselves. The extent to which the teachers believed in the reforms and trusted them was insufficient to motivate changes in their daily practice, moreover. Preservation of practice-as-usual but with adjustment of existing approaches to incorporate poorly-understood new elements thus produced distortion of both.

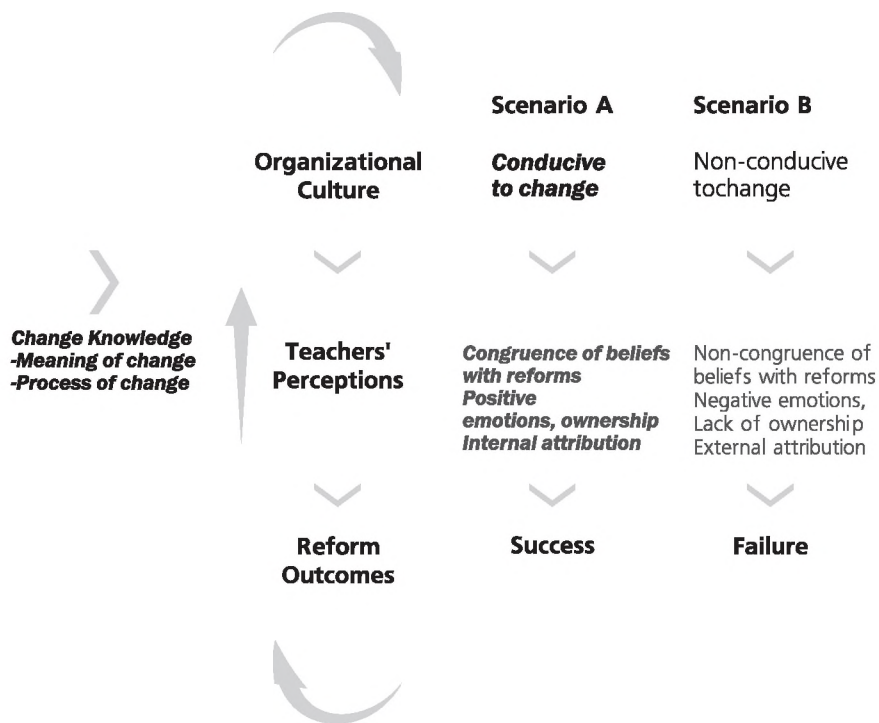


Figure 6.2: Analysis of teachers' perceptions: the case of Armenia²

When the emotions of the teachers were analysed, they showed them to have deep concerns and disappointment with regard to the inaccurately developed policies and careless attitudes on the part of policymakers and administrators. Depreciation of the teacher's job produced frustration, fear of being misunderstood and losing one's job, disappointment with regard to the implementation of the reforms, a lack of ownership and attribution of the reform failures to largely external and thus uncontrollable factors and unstable factors. This kind of attribution suggests that the amount of effort, which the teachers will expend in the future is minimal

² The elements missing in the Armenian case are indicated in bold and italic.

along with the potential for growth unless the external and largely uncontrollable factors from the perspective of the teachers somehow change.

The teachers' attitudes towards the reforms were mostly positive. This indicates a potential for more active involvement once the implementation process better prepares the teachers for the reform process. However, other attitudes and attitude-related elements, which are known to be conducive to successful reform, appeared to be lacking: enthusiasm, caring, interest in democratic practices, promotion of student responsibility and free interaction. And the question is therefore how such attitudes can best be instilled in a post-Soviet country like Armenia.

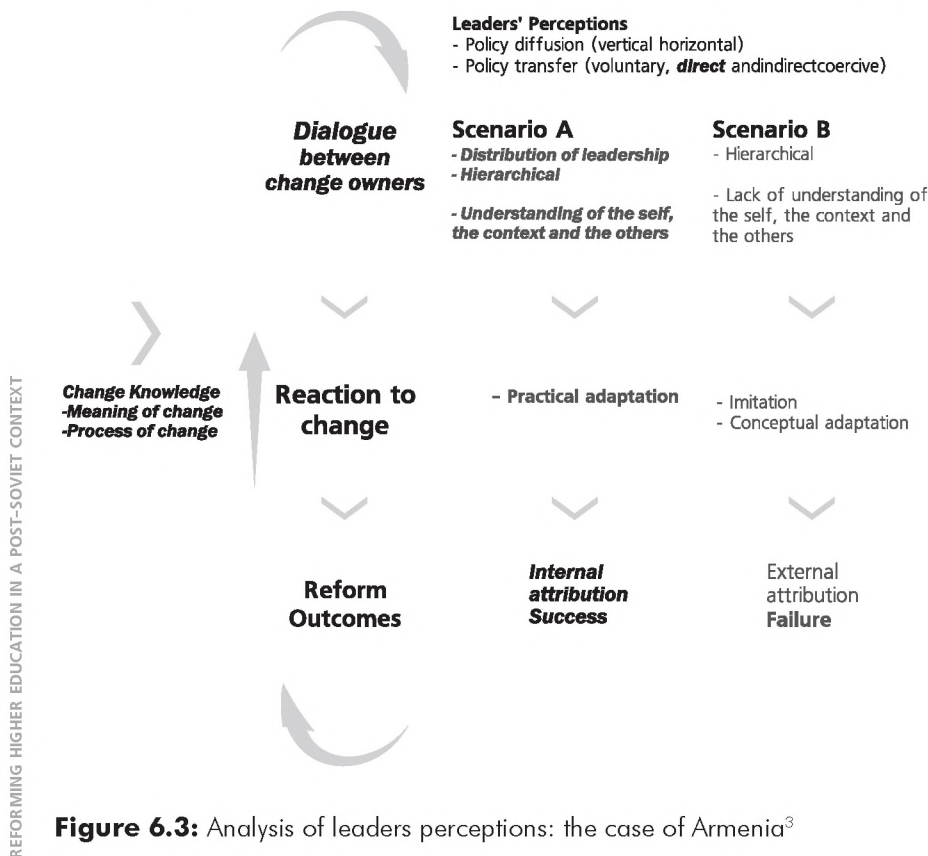
In the end, the analyses of the university teachers' reform perceptions revealed failed reform Scenario B. This is a scenario characterised by a lack of change knowledge on the part of both the teachers and administrators, which results in an organisational culture, which is not conducive to change, creates an incongruence between the teachers' reform beliefs and the reforms themselves, leads to negative emotions and therefore shows a major lack of ownership and attribution of the failed reform efforts to mostly external factors. Misinformation, misinterpretation and mistrust of the reforms being transferred from the West is the result. And with the depreciation of values, which teachers have cherished for so long, the new system being promoted by Armenian policymakers is unlikely to provide appealing alternative and thereby raise the teachers' trust. It follows, thus, that unless action is undertaken to promote meaningful changes via well-informed and carefully thought-through implementation policies, the success of the higher education reforms in Armenia will remain questionable.

Research question three: *What are the perceptions of higher education leaders in Armenia within the context of reforms?*

One of the major findings in the previous studies was the attribution of the reform failures by the teachers to those steering the reform process. The

university teachers blamed the leaders for the manner in which the reforms were organised and implemented in particular. In Chapter Five, we therefore explored how the leaders, who — as mentioned in Chapter Two — are also change owners perceived the higher education reforms in Armenia. More specifically, we explored the nature of their perceptions within the change context in terms of policy transfer and diffusion, their change knowledge, their emotional intelligence, their leadership approaches and their causal attributions regarding the failed reform efforts. Using the analytic framework developed in the previous phases of this research, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with six leaders who were the initiators of higher educational changes in Armenia.

As can be seen from Figure 6.3, the failed reform Scenario B surfaces again.



³ The elements missing in the Armenian case are indicated in bold and italic.

Regardless of the nature of the policy diffusion and transfer (i.e., top-down vs. bottom-up, voluntary vs. coercive), what is found to really matter at the level of implementation is the context into which the reforms are planted and the capacity of the change owners to handle the reform complexities. The data show a lack of change knowledge to manifest itself as a critical factor at the level of the reform leaders as well as at the level of the teachers. The lack of change knowledge among the reform leaders manifests itself in their perceptions of the role of the teachers in the change context, their leadership approaches and their emotional intelligence — which failed to help them elicit significant involvement on the part of the teachers. In addition to a lack of change knowledge, the reform leaders also attributed the reform failures to external and thus largely uncontrollable factors related to the policymakers, their peers, the teachers, students and society which questioned the implementation modes pursued by the reform leaders.

According to the leaders, the relevant changes were shaped by two major factors at the policy level: the collapse of the Soviet regime and the requirements of globalisation. The reform leaders perceived the modes of policy transfer to have both a voluntary and indirect coercive character. The transfer modes were perceived as voluntary when the Soviet regime collapsed, leaders sought to improve their universities and they sought to integrate their universities into the international community. They were perceived as indirectly coercive when a variety of external factors including technological changes, globalisation trends and later integration into the European Higher Education Area (i.e., Bologna process) created a favourable climate for policy transfer.

With regard to the leaders' reactions to change, a gradual shift from resistance to imitation and, ultimately, conceptual adaptation was perceived to have occurred among the teachers. However, the leaders were clearly concerned about a lack of practical adaptation, which showed people's behaviour and thus real change to not have occurred. In the words of the reform leaders themselves, the policies were not internalised because the complexity of the change process was underestimated by both the initiators of the reforms (i.e., reform leaders) and the government.

Underestimation of the complexity of change at the policy level had several ramifications at the level of reform implementation. To begin with, the leaders were geared towards quick fixes and therefore neglected the importance of building on their own change knowledge and that of the teachers as this is a time-consuming process. Rather ironically, this very flaw slowed the implementation process. Shaped by the leaders' lack of knowledge of how to implement reforms, the ones steering the process underestimated the importance of adopting a cyclic approach to reform implementation, of learning about the reforms within the actual change context and of involvement of the teachers in the change process. Of the six leaders interviewed, only one sympathised with the current status of the teachers and acknowledged underestimation of the importance of the teachers' role, their potential and - in the end - their isolation from the reform process.

The exclusion of the teachers from the reform process resulted in the imposition rather than internalisation of the reforms. The modes of operation were mainly top-down. Judging from the characteristic features of the leadership approaches pursued, the leadership was hierarchical, which is applicable in the case of higher education — provided activities and tools aimed at the distribution of the leadership via active involvement of the actual implementers are also called upon (Bolden et al., 2008a, 2008b). In the end, however, lack of such leadership and a lack of change knowledge brought about underestimation of the importance of the teachers and isolation, rather than inclusion, of the teachers from the change process.

A lack of emotional intelligence on the part of the reform leaders prevented them from developing the accurate perceptions of human and organisational behaviour needed to design an adequate approach to the reform problem. In particular, a lack of awareness of the change context and those actually in the change context hindered the development and maintenance of healthy and effective relationships or the key to effective change management. The leaders perceived the teachers as not being motivated and not having the capacity to undertake the change process, which shows an incapacity on the part of the leaders themselves to understand the change context.

Having to bear the burden of the reforms more or less alone, the leaders grew frustrated with the failure to achieve what was envisioned two decades ago. Impairments in the form of a lack of social and financial capital were then cited as impediments to successful implementation. Paired with the attribution of failed implementation outcomes to the teachers themselves, the leaders thus blamed all the implementation problems on the government, the teachers, the students and society at large. According to the leaders, the frequently cited lack of practical knowledge for how to make things happen referred to not only their shortcomings but also those of their peers, teachers and policymakers. The leaders thus attributed the failed reform outcomes to external and uncontrollable factors, which attests to their lack of ownership for the reform process as well. And such an outcome leads to only one conclusion: unless the design and implementation of the target reforms is carefully reconsidered, the possibility of successful reform will remain questionable at best.

To summarise

Inspection of the entire reform situation shows the following factors to play a major role in the nature and quality of the higher education reforms undertaken in a post-Soviet context. Overall, the two main change owners, namely the teachers and their leaders, were positive about the reforms and acknowledged the need of the proposed reforms. By blaming each other for the lack of success, however, they reveal a lack of dialogue between the two main actors in the change process, which also stems from mostly superficial change knowledge and a lack of emotional intelligence (i.e., ability to perceive the needs of others and cope with the pressures of reform). These types of attributions also lead to the conclusion that there was little dialogue between the other reform stakeholders — namely, the policymakers and researchers — and those responsible for actual reform. The major conclusion is, thus, that the complexity of educational change was hugely underestimated, a lack of change knowledge for how to implement reforms occurred and a dearth of emotional intelligence resulted in little or no dialogue between the change owners. Relinquishment of ownership and simply

warning about the impediments to change were then the result (i.e., failed reform implementation and thus failed reform).

6.2 Theoretical implications

In the following, four theoretical implications of this research will be considered in particular. First, an analytic framework was successfully adopted to integrate concepts from the policy and educational change literatures and thereby understand the nature and quality of educational policy diffusion/transfer and the perceptions of the reform implementers in a post-Soviet context. The relevant theoretical concepts thus received empirical support and were confirmed by not only the case of the teachers but also the case of the leaders. This indicates the validity of the research findings.

With the integration of the concepts from the different lines of research throughout this research, we were able to develop an analytic framework which accurately characterises the processing of learning within a change context and can thus guide the design of adequately informed policies and implementation approaches in the future (Figure 6.4). Identification of the type of policy diffusion and transfer at both the policy level and the actual level of implementation is critical. The diffusion of policy and national priorities can be vertical or horizontal. The transfer of policy can be voluntary or involuntary and directly or indirectly coercive.

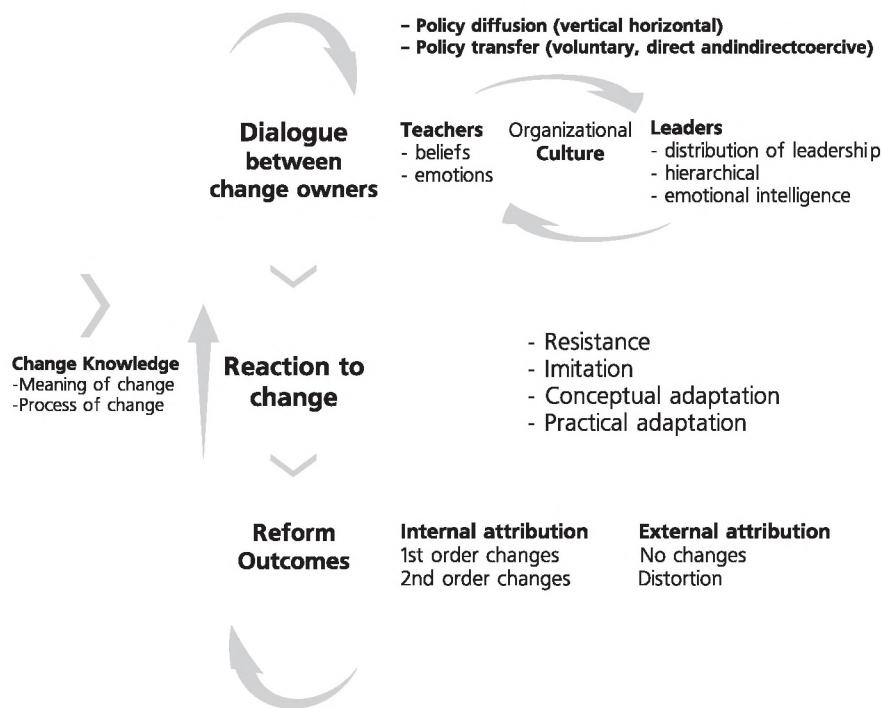


Figure 6.4: An integrated analytic framework of educational change

Particularly critical is the context into which proposed reforms are planted and the perceptions and behaviour of the change owners (i.e., those who are supposed to bring the reforms to life). Conditions favourable for the change owners to learn and build upon already existing change knowledge (i.e., their knowledge of the proposed changes and the change process) must be created. To vitalise the policies, it is necessary for the change owners to engage in a cyclic process of reform implementation which includes active dialogue and thereby the development of an in-depth understanding of the policies and intended reforms. For the teachers, incentives to make the target changes must be present and thus

an organisational culture, which is conducive to learning and leaders, who can convey the necessary values.

Just how the teachers react to change also depends upon the leadership potential of the university management. An adequate level of change knowledge and emotional intelligence is needed to manage the complexities of change. Depending upon the change leaders, the reactions of the actual implementers can take the form of resistance, imitation, conceptual adaptation and practical adaptation. In cases of resistance, change agents have typically rejected policy and only pursued those changes they feel comfortable with. In cases of imitation or conceptual adaptation, changes may be implemented in a largely superficial manner without fundamental changes of behaviour. In both the cases, the reform outcomes are disappointing and often attributed to external, presumably uncontrollable, factors in order for the implementers to not feel bad about themselves. The reforms have failed, however.

For real change to happen, an active dialogue between the change owners must occur and be fed by adequate change knowledge and the adoption of a cyclic approach to reform implementation. Such an approach can lead to practical adaptation and thus real changes in the behaviour of the implementers. Satisfied with their accomplishments, in turn, the implementers will tend to attribute the change outcomes to internal factors and conclude that they are responsible, at least in part, for the success of the reforms with motivation for further change as a result.

A second theoretical implication of this research concerns the factors identified as crucial for successful reform. The combination of concepts within a single analytic framework, as developed here, provided a fine-grained overview of the process of policy diffusion and transfer together with insight into the roles of the direct implementers (i.e., teachers and leaders in this case). Two streams of literature were called upon to do this. The first was the published body of educational change research (Cuban, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994;

Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Fullan, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Scott, 2009). The second was the published body of policy diffusion and transfer research (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; McLendon, 2003; Bache & Taylor, 2003; Marsh & Sharman, 2009). The focus of the latter is strongly on general policy issues with less attention thus devoted to the mechanisms underlying local policy implementation. In contrast, analyses of educational change typically take the general policy issues for granted to examine the local implementation of policies in considerable but unintegrated detail.

One of the most important contributions of the present research to the field of educational policy diffusion and transfer thus concerns insight into the quality and nature of the higher education reforms undertaken in a developing country from the perspectives of the local implementers. In gathering this information, however, it was also possible to identify those elements, which are perceived as necessary by local implementers for successful educational change. Each of the elements in the analytic framework developed here appeared to be crucial for successful reform. The combination of elements provided a detailed picture of the policy diffusion and transfer process while illuminating the roles of the direct implementers (i.e., teachers and their leaders) in the change process.

The third theoretical implication of this research concerns the fact that the study was undertaken in a developing country. In the policy diffusion and transfer literature, very little research has explored the process of policy diffusion occurring from developed countries to developing countries. As Marsh and Sharman (2009) note, most studies tend to analyse either a subset of Western (i.e., developed) countries or a large data set to determine global coverage. Developing countries tend to be overlooked and those with a strong Soviet legacy in particular. Furthermore, research on the complexities of higher education reform in developing countries is largely missing (cf. Bache & Taylor, 2003). Despite the fact that, as a result of globalisation, educational policies are increasingly being transferred from the West to developing countries (Heyneman, 2010), little research has examined just how the local implementers perceive reform efforts or the experiences of the

local implementers. Exploration of the perceptions and experiences of the direct implementers of reforms, however, can certainly deepen our understanding of the mechanisms of change and thereby promote more informed policy design and implementation. By studying higher education reform in a post-Soviet and therefore newly emerging democratic environment, the present study provided valuable insights into the perceptions of the direct implementers and the extent of values still cherished. Most importantly, the present study of higher education reform in a post-Soviet country has emphasised the importance of teacher agency for the implementation of reforms — a concept, which is still quite new to developing countries and particularly those with a strong Soviet legacy.

A fourth theoretical implication is that it is possible to analyse the opinions of those teachers involved in higher education reform efforts and also the opinions of their leaders using the same analytic framework. It was also possible to analyse a wide range of factors in combination with each other and thus obtain a coherent picture of the perceptions and experiences of the local implementers involved in the higher education reforms. Such cognitive and behavioural concepts as teacher change knowledge (Fullan, 2004), beliefs about reforms, teaching and learning (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Archer, 1999; Kember & Kwan, 2000), emotions within the context of reforms (Hargreaves, 1994; van Veen, 2005; Goodson et al., 2006), beliefs about the organisational culture (Hargreaves, 1994; Fullan 1996a; Schein, 1997; Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Scott, 2009) and causal attributions (Weiner, 1992, 2000) were examined in conjunction with the reform outcomes to gain insight into the teachers' perceptions when viewed from a number of angles and not just one. A similar approach was adopted to explore the local leaders' perceptions. In this case, however, the concepts of policy diffusion and transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; Bache & Taylor, 2003), change knowledge (Fullan & Scott, 2009), leadership approach (Heifetz, 2000; Spillane et al., 2001; Bolden et al., 2008a, 2009), emotional intelligence (Fullan, 1997; Caruso, 2003; Shankman & Allen, 2008) and causal attribution (Weiner, 1992, 2000) were used to gain insight into elements, which are critical for successful reform. The combination of the aforementioned concepts showed

the policy and educational innovation literatures - which would otherwise have been explored in isolation - to have been productively combined.

6.3 Practical implications

The practical implications of this research evolve around mainly the generation of tools and guidelines, which seriously take the agency of the direct implementers of educational reforms into consideration during the analysis of policy diffusion and transfer. In general, three main practical implications have emerged: (1) the analytic framework of educational policy diffusion and transfer as a tool through which to consider the status and potentials of a given reform; (2) a questionnaire, which provides for deeper insights into the actual reform implementation revealing the agency of teachers, their extent of knowledge about the meaning and process of change; (3) guidelines for those projecting educational policy diffusion and transfer and subsequent implementation.

The first practical implication involves the analytic framework developed here to understand the ongoing educational change process. The analytic framework can be used to quickly scan for policy diffusion and transfer and to identify potential outcomes during both the early stages of reform and later stages of actual implementation. In such a manner, those responsible for the design of educational innovations and stimulation of implementation can delve deeper into elements, which can hinder or facilitate changes.

A second tool, which was generated during this research project and may have considerable practical utility is the questionnaire used to explore the teachers' perceptions of the higher education reform efforts. Using this questionnaire, we gained insight into the teachers' agency and attributions with regard to the reform outcomes. Such results can help policymakers and reform implementers make more informed decisions about the design of innovation policies, the courses of policy diffusion and policy transfer, and policy implementation.

The third practical implication of this research is that the analytic framework can be adopted as a guideline for how to design or improve reform diffusion, transfer and implementation. One of the major elements to consider, for example, is the direct implementers' change knowledge. Policymakers and reform implementers must consider the extent of change knowledge already present and subsequently acquired during the course of a reform effort. An active dialogue between reform stakeholders is also a prerequisite for successful reform as a change undertaken in isolation is doomed to failure. The change knowledge of the change leaders and an active dialogue with them should also occur to avoid underestimation of the complexity of the change process, which can lead to only quick fixes, short-term interventions and only degradation of the system as a result.

In sum, the present research is useful for improving the practices of policy diffusion, transfer and implementation for both higher education reforms and related types of reforms in a post-Soviet context. The lessons learned within the context of Armenia can be applied to other post-Soviet developing countries. Attention should be paid to the lines of policy diffusion and transfer from a developed country (or countries) to the developing country, the role allocated to teachers, the relevant organisational culture, the reform sense-making of the direct implementers (i.e., teachers and their leaders), the attitudes of the stakeholders towards the reform process and the change knowledge of the stakeholders as these all play a crucial role in the success of an educational change effort.

6.4 Strengths and limitations

While a growing number of research projects are turning to what Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) call the 'third paradigm for research methodologies' or a mixed-methods approach to educational reform, the mixed-methods approach adopted here has its strengths and limitations.

One of the strengths of the mixed-methods approach adopted here is indeed

that it calls upon both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The present research unfolded in five consecutive phases and thereby constituted a nevertheless integrated approach with each step building on the previous steps: (1) literature review, (2) document analysis, (3) questionnaire with open- and close-ended questions, (4) interviews with university teachers and (5) interviews with reform leaders. Such an approach ensured complementarity as the strengths of qualitative methods were used to overcome the weaknesses of quantitative methods and vice versa. The same phenomena were examined using different methods (see Chapters Three and Four). Furthermore, the data collected regarding the leaders' perceptions confirmed the data on the teachers' perceptions (Chapters Three, Four and Five). The data was also deepened and broadened using the mixed-methods approach adopted here. And last, but not least, the mixed methods promoted development as the data obtained using qualitative methods could be used to inform and build on the quantitative part of the research and vice versa.

A second strength of the mixed-methods approach adopted here is that the research was conducted in an authentic environment where first-hand data was collected. The environment we explored had been undergoing change for about two decades but little impact had been registered and only cherished values were being threatened in the eyes of the teachers. As already noted, attention to the actual opinions of the teachers and leaders involved in the processes of policy diffusion and transfer in developing countries is rare. Exploration of reform implementation from the perspectives of the direct implementers in the post-Soviet country of Armenia thus provided a rich source of information for delving deeper into what factors trigger and inhibit successful reform. A new angle for considering reform transfer, diffusion and implementation is thus introduced.

A third strength of this study is the combination of two streams of research and concepts to examine reform implementation. In such a manner, concepts referring to the driving forces at the policy and implementation levels were brought together. At the policy level, the emphasis is on the modes of transfer and relevant policy environment. At the implementation level, the emphasis is on

those directly involved in the process of reform implementation. Attention to the various concepts and their interrelationships is thus critical and occurred in the present research.

A fourth strength of the mixed-methods approach adopted here was the exploration of the teachers' perceptions in terms of a combination of factors (i.e., both cognitive and behavioural factors), which have only been studied separately in previous educational innovation research. An integrative approach was thus adopted to explore change knowledge, perceptions of the organisational culture, beliefs, attitudes, emotions and causal attributions within a reform context and, in such a manner, deeper and greater insight could be gained into the perceptions of the actual implementers. When analysed together, the beliefs, emotions and perceptions of the organisational culture provide much more information than when analysed in isolation. Taken together, these concepts provide a meaningful framework for understanding and interpreting the reform perceptions of university teachers within a context of educational change.

A possible limitation on the present research is that the Bologna reform history has been too short to have a real impact. Although it is indeed, in this particular case, too early to gauge the effects of the Bologna process, the track record from the past two decades of higher education reform suggests that deeper investigation of the processes of policy diffusion, transfer and implementation should be undertaken to prevent flawed implementation and further disappointment.

A second possible limitation is the extent to which the concept of change knowledge was explored in this research. Considering change knowledge to be mainly a theoretical concept (Fullan, 2004, 2007; Fullan & Scott, 2009), this study did not explicitly explore how change knowledge can be measured and put into actual practice to yield maximal effects. Further research is thus necessary to provide empirical support for the concept of change knowledge.

A third limitation is that this study drew mainly upon the perceptions of the implementers and leaders in addition to policy analyses and did not conduct observations. It follows that additional research should be undertaken to observe the actual change process and document the complexities of reform implementation at the actual practice level.

Finally, the questionnaire data were gathered from seven universities, which have complied with the Bologna requirements. There are 65 universities in Armenia, and only eight of them have been leading the change process since the 1990s. The present data therefore cannot be generalised to the whole population of universities in Armenia or post-Soviet countries as the sample was particularly well-informed with regard to the reforms and in favour of the reforms, which is not characteristic of the other universities in Armenia. During the last three years of this study, however, all of the universities in Armenia joined the Bologna process and there is thus a high probability that the results reported in this study may be representative of the other universities as well.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

Further research should be undertaken to explore the concept of change knowledge more fully. The theoretical concept of change knowledge (Fullan, 2004, 2007; Fullan & Scott, 2009) has little empirical support, which makes further exploration of how it can be measured and built upon crucial. A comparative study in which reform efforts are undertaken in a system, which lacks sufficient change knowledge versus a system, which has sufficient change knowledge might be conducted to gain greater insight into those factors and mechanisms, which appear to promote successful change. The question of just how to support and facilitate change would also thus be given a strong empirical answer.

The perceptions of the reform leaders were studied in only six interviews in the present research. To gain deeper insight into their perceptions, their practices,

the mechanisms driving their behaviour and the leadership approaches leading to higher education reform success, a larger-scale study should be undertaken. Observations of the leaders in actual practice might be undertaken to highlight what they do or do not do to elicit activities and use of the tools necessary to ensure active involvement of the teachers in the reform process and thereby ownership of the reform process.

Yet another direction for future research is to examine other post-Soviet - and thus developing - countries using the same concepts as in the present study to see if similar patterns emerge. The results of such research may help with the formulation of policy, which is of relevance for the developing world in general and the post-Soviet countries in particular. New angles on the diffusion and transfer of educational policy from developed countries may also be provided by such research.

6.6 Final remarks

At the level of reform implementation, very few changes are based upon the findings of research and, paradoxically, this is particularly the case in the field of higher education. While great at studying and recommending changes for others (Fullan & Scott, 2009), universities appear to be reluctant to engage in a process of change themselves and not very good at it when they do. Major gaps between research and policymaking, on one hand, and the teachers and administrators, on the other hand, still prevail. Despite being cognisant of this, universities take very few steps to establish an active dialogue between the actors in an educational change process. This is doubly the case in developing countries where very few changes are informed by meaningful research and a lack of dialogue between the stakeholders is standard.

With regard to the capacity of a reform system in general and the change knowledge of the direct implementers of the reforms in particular (i.e., the teachers and leaders), all of the factors discussed in the present research must

be in harmony for reform to occur. If overlooked, the proposed changes may actually result in the degradation of the system and result in system collision.

The common message, which thus surfaces is that fundamental educational change is challenging, hard to implement with success and - by no means - a quick fix. To make real changes happen, the capacities of the change owners must be built upon and their knowledge of the desired changes deepened where possible. Joining efforts in a cyclic approach to reform implementation should promote the necessary learning within the context to be changed and thereby effective reform. Of particular importance is an active dialogue between the change owners and serious attention to the role of teachers in educational reforms and their active involvement in the design and implementation of the reforms and those components, which can lead to ownership. Only then can successful outcomes be expected.

In closing, in contexts such as that of Armenia where so many spheres of life are undergoing transition, problems and issues like the ones encountered in this study are bound to arise. The challenge is the capacity of the change owners to overcome the problems. It is our hope that the results of this research will contribute to an awareness and understanding of those elements, which are critical for successful educational change.

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• APPENDIX I

Teacher Cognition within the Context of Higher Education Reforms Questionnaire

General Instructions: We are interested in your perceptions, emotions and knowledge about current higher education reforms, namely the Bologna Process, the Ministry of Education and Science has initiated. The aim is to identify factors that facilitate and inhibit the current reforms.

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Please, tick in the box that best explains your stance towards the reforms. Please, be as genuine as possible. The confidentiality of responses is guaranteed.

APPENDIX

A

A. Beliefs about Reforms

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Good reforms preserve good traditions					
2. Good reforms build on good traditions					
3. Good reforms promote academic freedom					
4. Good reforms promote freedom of choice					
5. The Soviet education system is much better than the one proposed by the reforms					
6. There are substantial differences between the two systems (former Soviet one and the one proposed by Bologna Declaration) with regards to content					
7. There are substantial differences between the two systems (former Soviet one and the one proposed by Bologna Declaration) with regards to structure					
8. The educational approaches proposed by the reforms meet today's needs					
9. Reforms aimed at European integration are of great importance for the society					
10. Integration reforms provide more opportunities for quality education					
11. Reforms promote equal access to education					

B. Organisational Culture

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
12. Management recognises and makes use of my abilities and skills					
13. The environment at our university is conducive to creating learning culture					
14. I am encouraged to develop new and more efficient ways to do my work					
15. Employees work well together to solve problems and get the job done					
16. Management is flexible and understands the importance of balancing my work and personal life					
17. I have received the training I need to implement the reforms efficiently and effectively					
18. The management is taking reasonable steps for reform implementation					
19. The university has necessary resources to make the change process successful					
20. The university management has the capacity to develop leadership in others on an ongoing basis					
21. I am involved in decision-making that affects my job					
22. I have access to the information I need to get my job done.					

C. Beliefs Regarding Teaching and Learning

	Tick one that applies				
23. The teaching approach that is prevalent in Armenia is	Didactic	Discussion/ group work	Combination of didactic and discussion/ group work	Discovery	Other:
24. The teaching approach that I think is applicable to our educational system is	Didactic	Discussion/ group work	Combination of didactic and discussion/ group work	Discovery	Other:
25. The teaching approach that I use is	Didactic	Discussion/ group work	Combination of didactic and discussion/ group work	Discovery	Other:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
26. Students learn best when there is consistency between their knowledge base and material presented					
27. The curriculum at our university is consistent with the principles put forth by student-centered teaching and learning					
28. I encourage critical thinking in my classroom.					
29. I encourage unique experiences that all members of the class bring					
30. I am willing to relinquish the traditional position of sole authority					
31. I have enough time to manage individual approach to student learning					
32. Students learn best when they are allowed to explore problems on their own					
33. Students learn best when they explore problems in groups					
34. I encourage developing student inquiry skills					
35. I guide the students through the learning process					
36. The knowledge my students obtain will help them to deal with problems in real life					
37. Student-centered teaching and learning creates independent learners					
38. Student-centered teaching and learning creates motivated learners					
39. Students have an appropriate background to be involved in student-centered teaching and learning					
40. Teachers have an appropriate background to be involved in student-centered teaching and learning					

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	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
41. Students learn best through lecturing and taking notes					
42. Students learn best through teacher explanation					
43. If more time could be spent on drill, students would be better in the subject					
44. Final exams and tests are the best way to check student progress					
45. Teaching through only lecturing is the best way of learning					
46. Students should abide by the knowledge conveyed by the teacher					
47. The curriculum should be organised around textbooks available					

D. Emotions Regarding Reforms

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
48. I enjoy my job					
49. I still enjoy my job within the reform context					
50. I feel empowered by the new teaching methods					
51. The student-centered teaching and learning is exactly the one I feel confident with					
52. There is enough time for me to carry out my responsibilities					
53. The organisational demands for change are very much welcome					
54. Being committed to the change process makes me feel more contented					
55. I feel comfortable with holding ownership of the reforms					
56. Implementing reforms with the energy I have is rewarding					
57. I feel disappointed with the constraints reform puts over my work					
58. I feel disappointed with the reform implementation					

E. Change Knowledge

59. What is the meaning of change? List at least three aims
60. What is the change process like in Armenia?
List at least three processes

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
61. I am familiar with the moral purpose of the reform, namely improving society through improving educational systems and thus the learning of all citizens (reducing the gap between high and low performance students)					
62. I understand the change process thoroughly enough					
63. I have the necessary background knowledge on change process					
64. I constantly build on my capacity (acquire new knowledge, skills and competences)					
65. I learn from my peers, especially those who are further along in implementing new ideas					
66. I learn about the change process during implementation					
67. Learning in context helps me to come up with new ideas					
68. The competences I have help me turn information into actionable knowledge					

69. What is the title of your position?

70. Are you a full time or part time faculty member

71. What is the highest level of education you have received?

a. Bachelor degree _____

b. Master's degree _____

c. Doctoral degree _____

d. Other: specify _____

72. How long have you been teaching including all faculty positions you have held?

73. How long have you been teaching at this institution?

74. Sex:

Male _____

Female _____

75. Age: _____

76. First name _____;

Last name _____



• APPENDIX II

Interviews with University Teachers **Lead Questions**

The following check list was used to guide the interviews with the teachers so that uniformity and consistency of the data is assured. Alternatively, the teachers were asked to reflect on the topics that they considered to be important to convey. The questions evolved around the following concepts: beliefs about reforms, change knowledge, emotions, attitudes, and organisational culture.

Beliefs

1. What do you think of the reform implementation in general?
2. What do you think about the new teaching and learning approaches promoted at your institution?
3. Do you think the innovation is successful if yes what are the causes?
4. Do you think the innovation is not successful, if yes or not, what are the causes?
5. Do you accept the reforms the way they are? Why? How would you assess the current state of the reforms undertaken by your institution?
6. How would you assess the current state of the reforms undertaken by your institution? Do you think the implementers have enough energy, ideas, commitment to implement reforms? Why?
7. What are the teaching and learning practices that you used to employ?
8. What changes have taken place in your teaching and learning practices over years?
9. How would you characterise your current teaching and learning practices?

APPENDIX

A

Change knowledge

1. What are the reform goals/objectives?
2. What are the main policy directives?
3. What are their advantages and disadvantages?
4. What are the mechanisms driving a real change?

Emotions

1. How would you, in general, describe the feelings you have towards the reforms?
2. Do you feel your role is valued within the reform context?
3. Do you feel you are actually contributing or not?
4. Do you hold ownership of the process?
5. Do you think the implementers hold ownership of the reforms?
In what way?

Attitude

1. What is your attitude towards the reforms in general?
2. What is your attitude towards the new teaching and learning approaches?
3. What is your attitude towards your colleagues and administration?
4. What is your attitude towards your students and work?

Organisational culture

1. What policies, strategies, resources, and actions are designed to increase people's collective power to move the system forward? (in particular capacity building issue: how do they develop new knowledge, skills and competencies)
2. Is the culture prevailing at your institution conducive to learning?

- Are there strategies designed for the people to learn from each other and become collectively committed to improvement? Why?
3. Do the reforms designed allow for long-term ownership development? How?
 4. How would you describe your role within the organisation, collaboration with the colleagues, and relationships with the administration?
 5. How does the organisation stimulate your involvement in the change process?
 6. Is the leadership spread throughout the organisation or is it accumulated in the hands of some administrators? Do you think it is normal? Why?

Further reflections

This was meant to allow the teachers to provide any other information they find relevant to add

1. What other information do you find relevant to add?
2. What do you think can be done to improve the situation and ensure successful implementation?



• APPENDIX III

Interviews with Leaders Lead Questions

The following check list was used to guide the interviews with the leaders so that uniformity and consistency of the data is assured. Alternatively, the leaders were asked to reflect on the topics that they considered to be important to convey. The questions evolved around the following concepts: policy diffusion and transfer, change knowledge, leadership approaches and emotional intelligence.

Policy diffusion and transfer

1. In which way did the policy diffusion take place: imitation or adaptation? How did it unfold in either way?
2. Was the policy transfer voluntary, direct coercive, or indirect coercive? How did it happen?
3. What was the implementation at policy level or in rhetoric like?
4. What were the differences at the practical level?
5. What was the content of reforms like before and after Bologna Declaration?
6. What was the process of reforms like before and after Bologna Declaration?
7. How were your reflections about the necessity, content, and feasibility of reforms when you heard about them (before and after Bologna Declaration)?

APPENDIX

A

Change knowledge

1. What is reform content about? What are the moral purposes of the reform?
2. What are the mechanisms that drive the change process?
3. What is the reform context like? What impedes and facilitates reforms?

Leadership approaches

1. How do you define, present, and carry out micro tasks?
 - a. What was your daily work schedule like?
 - b. What did you do next: meetings? discussions? send documentation around? to whom? to whom did they talk...
2. Who are the key players in the reform implementation?
3. How do you interact with subordinates and peers?
4. What are non-canonical practices like?
5. What is the informal leadership potential of your staff like?
6. What are the tools, artifacts, and organisational structures of leadership practice?
7. What are teachers' potential to effect change in instruction?
8. What is the teachers' role in the reform implementation process?
 - a. What are the tools, routines, and structures? (tools - documents, resources, methods; routines - meetings, workshops, trainings, discussions).
9. What kind of relationships exists between the leaders and followers? What is the frequency, format, content; trust, dependency? Is there an active dialogue between them?
10. Why did you act in that particular way?
11. What are the links between macro functions and the micro tasks? What is their relation to instruction and instructional change?

Emotional intelligence

1. How do you feel within the change context?
2. Have you ever thought of giving up?
3. Have you felt being valued by teachers? By top administrators?
By the Ministry?
4. What networks are there in your organisation?
5. How do you interpret the current context of reforms?
6. What are the teachers' emotions within the change context?
7. How do you create connections between, among and with people?
8. How do you make a use from the assets that come from differences
of the others?
9. Do you feel empathy for the teachers?
10. How do you inspire them or influence them?

At the end of each interview, the interviewer presented the results of the previous research. The aim was to look at the level of emotional intelligence of the leaders.

- the leaders' awareness of the teachers' beliefs and values
- the teachers' perceptions
- the extent to which they took their voices into account.

Further reflections

This was meant to allow the teachers to provide any other information they found relevant to add

1. What other information do you find relevant to add?
2. What do you think can be done to improve the situation and ensure
successful implementation?



• SUMMARY

Research context, aims and methods

At the turn of the 20th century, globalisation trends marked a new era in the sphere of higher education. In 1999, an attempt to create a broader and more competitive higher education system in Europe and other countries culminated in the launch of the Bologna process. The major aim was to establish higher education standards and implicitly transfer a particular model of higher education to establish a knowledge-driven economy in Europe. This model entailed the adoption of a new approach to higher education in Europe and especially for a post-Soviet country as Armenia, which has a very different tradition in higher education and very different political, constitutional and cultural context than most countries in Europe.

The main aim of this research was to take an in-depth look at the mechanisms underlying the implementation of higher education reforms in a post-Soviet country like Armenia. Specifically, the diffusion and transfer of education policy from the context of West Europe to a post-Soviet context and the success of the implementation process in the eyes of the direct implementers (i.e., higher education teachers and leaders in Armenia) were at issue.

To deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the implementation of higher education reforms, the educational change process was examined at both the policy and implementation levels. At the policy level, the focus was on the modes of diffusion and transfer of policy from developed countries to less developed countries. At the implementation level, the focus was on the perceptions of the direct implementers of the higher education reforms in Armenia.

The thesis exists out of six chapters. The first presents the theoretical frame and research questions. In Chapter Two, the observed modes of educational policy diffusion and transfer are analysed along with their impact at the level of

SUMMARY

S

implementation. In Chapters Three and Four, the reform and implementation perceptions of the university teachers are explored. In Chapter Five, the perceptions of the higher education leaders and their reasoning with regard to the implementation process and reform outcomes in Armenia are examined. Chapter Six provides the main conclusions and discussion.

Chapter Two:

Educational Policy Diffusion and Transfer: The Case of Armenia

The purpose of the studies presented in Chapter Two was to develop an analytic framework to analyse and understand the driving forces behind educational change. We concentrated on the nature of educational policy diffusion and transfer from developed countries to a post-Soviet country, Armenia. The motive for this inquiry was to understand the rather disappointing outcomes of the reform process in Armenia despite the positive attitudes towards the reforms of all actors involved. To explore and characterise the underlying change mechanisms possibly at play, the literatures on educational change and policy diffusion and transfer were reviewed. Such concepts as dialogue among the owners of a change, change knowledge, which determines such a dialogue and the outcomes of a change endeavour were explored. The concepts identified in the two streams were then integrated into a tentative analytic framework to help us examine the diffusion and transfer of higher education policy to Armenia. The specific research methods were a literature review, policy document analyses and the analyses of the responses to two open-ended questions, which were posed as part of a larger survey conducted within the larger context of this research. Examination of the higher education reforms in Armenia with the aid of this analytic framework showed the following components to be lacking: change knowledge, a holistic and cyclic approach to reform implementation, a dialogue between the stakeholders, practical adaptation of the reforms and second order changes. Most relevant seemed to be the lack of change knowledge on the part

of the stakeholders. The existence of change knowledge would have promoted and possibly ensured an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms needed for successful educational change. The elements missing from the Armenian change process, moreover, are actually the elements that make practical adaptation of reforms and second-order changes a reality.

Chapter Three:

Perceptions of University Teachers about the Higher Education Reforms in Armenia

In Chapter Three, the university teachers' perceptions and reactions to the higher education reforms in Armenia were explored. A survey was developed based on the analytical frame, including concepts such as change knowledge, nature of the organisational culture, beliefs, emotions and causal attributions to understand the teachers' perceptions of the reform efforts and outcomes. The analytic framework encompasses two extreme scenarios, which represent reform success and reform failure. 279 university teachers participated in the survey.

Scenario B or, in other words, the failed reform scenario appears to apply. The teachers are positive about the proposed reforms provided they are implemented in a constructive and consistent manner. The change knowledge of the implementers shows only a superficial understanding of the change process and a dearth of background information to initiate the reforms. The responses to both the open-ended questionnaire items and the interview questions show the teachers to mainly complain about insufficient knowledge to implement the reforms and only a superficial understanding of the change process by their leaders and themselves.

The relevant organisational culture contributed little to the implementation of the higher education reforms as the teachers considered the culture at their institutions to not be conducive to change. The data show organisational deficiencies to

prevent active involvement of the teachers in the design and implementation of the reforms. The teachers' beliefs show little congruence with the reforms to be implemented. While the teachers believe in the necessity of the changes, they also consider preservation of their traditions and Soviet practices to be crucial as well. These two tendencies, namely change and preservation, can be attributed to the teachers' understandable desire to improve and change but still feel safe. Last, but not least, the teachers showed mainly negative feelings towards the reforms and the manner in which they were being implemented by policymakers and administrators.

A major finding with regard to the teachers' emotions was that they cared - in the fullest sense of the word - about the quality of their educational system. Quality was high on the teachers' agendas, which is a prerequisite for reform success. Their major worries concerned inaccurately developed policies and a careless attitude towards reform implementation on the part of policymakers. The attitudes of the latter resulted in a lack of ownership for the reform changes among the teachers and thus led the teachers to attribute the failed reform outcomes to external and largely uncontrollable factors.

Chapter Four:

The Voices of Teachers within the Context of Higher Education Reforms in Armenia.

In Chapter Four, we delved deeper into university teachers' perceptions by examining their concerns with regard to the West European reforms. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken to triangulate and expand the findings in Chapter Three.

The results showed that a crucial element for successful reform implementation, teachers' change knowledge, to be very superficial and thus providing a poor background for the initiation of reforms. The milieu at the institutions (i.e.,

organisational culture) is also not conducive to change. There is thus little congruence between the teachers' beliefs about the reforms, and they felt neglected in the design and implementation of the reforms. The teachers also showed little faith in the manner in which the reforms were implemented. The teachers preserved their usual practices while conceptually adapting the new approaches, which led to a distortion of both.

The analyses of the teachers' emotions showed mostly negative emotions: frustration, fear of being misunderstood and losing one's job, feeling depreciated as a professional, disappointment with the changes, lack of ownership and major concerns about the implementation process and the manner in which the administrators and policymakers steered it in particular.

The teachers' attitudes towards the reforms, in contrast, were found to be mostly positive. This indicates the existence of a potential to be supportive and involved in reform process if sufficient background knowledge and support are provided. However, attitudes conducive to effective change were clearly lacking, such as enthusiasm, caring, democratic approach, promotion of student responsibility and free interaction.

Logically, the major findings in this study were found to also be associated with the overwhelming attribution of reform pitfalls to external and uncontrollable factors by the teachers we interviewed. The teachers complained about implementation flaws, which appear to be due to incompetence on the parts of the policymakers and administrators and insufficient background knowledge on the parts of the students and teachers to engage in student-centred teaching and learning. *The attribution of negative outcomes to external and uncontrollable factors by the teachers also thus demonstrates an understandable lack of ownership and involvement in the reform process.*

In sum, a widespread lack of change knowledge resulted in misinformation and misinterpretation of the reforms to be promoted, which resulted in teacher distrust of the reforms transferred from the West. While depriving teachers of the values,

which they have cherished for many years, moreover, the new system being promoted by the Armenian policymakers failed to provide them with attractive new values (i.e., sufficient background knowledge) and thereby failed to instil trust in the reforms.

Chapter Five:

What do leaders think? Reflections on the Implementation of Higher Education Reforms in Armenia

One of the major concerns expressed by the teachers in the previous studies was the major pitfalls created by those responsible for steering the reform process. To get a complete picture of the Armenian change context, it was therefore decided in the final stage of this research to examine the reform implementation process in Armenia through the eyes of those responsible for the initiation and implementation of the reforms. Semi-structured interviews with six central reform leaders were undertaken.

The results showed the leaders to perceive the need for the reforms to be conditioned by the collapse of the Soviet regime, on one hand, and globalisation trends, on the other hand. At the same time, the changed knowledge of these leaders was limited, which explains the observed lack of practical application and incapacity of their peers, the teachers and the policymakers to make things happen in Armenia. Geared towards quick fixes and avoidance of anything which might slow things down, the leaders failed to build upon albeit limited but already existing knowledge and, ironically, thereby slowed things down via flawed implementation.

A lack of emotional intelligence on the part of the leaders expressed itself as an incapacity to develop accurate social perceptions of the human and organisational behaviour related to the reforms and thus develop adequate solutions for the problems inherent to change. In particular, the leaders failed

to learn within the actual change context and thereby expand their knowledge and awareness of it along with that of others. This gap also gave rise to major misunderstandings as the leaders perceived the teachers as the ones with no motivation and no capacity to change.

The lack of change knowledge and emotional intelligence on the part of reform leaders and policymakers appears to have resulted in mostly top-down management (i.e., activities and management tools) with little involvement of the actual change implementers as the outcome. Hierarchical leadership was found to be the case, which may actually be appropriate within the context of higher education when the leadership includes the actual implementers. Top-down management is thus not necessarily mistaken and may even be justified - depending on the circumstances. What the current study showed, however, is that - regardless of the nature of the policy diffusion, top-down or bottom-up - change endeavours are destined to fail if an active dialogue between the different stakeholders, their change knowledge and involvement of the direct implementers are not part of the endeavour.

Last, but not least, the causal attributions of the reform leaders with regard to the reform outcomes were found to refer to mostly external and uncontrollable factors, which attests to their lack of ownership for the reform process. The leaders tended to blame the teachers, the government, the students and society at large for all of the problems encountered during the reform process. These findings are striking in light of the results of the previous studies showing the teachers' perceptions of the reform processes and the way they attributed for the failures. Both the teachers and leaders shared an initially positive attitude towards the proposed reforms and a desire to realise educational improvement. However, they both subsequently blame each other for the reform failures but for slightly different reasons. In both the studies of the teachers and the leaders, an initial and major lack of change knowledge is documented. To avoid being slowed down by the development of the necessary background knowledge, the change leaders actually slowed the change process in the end with the use of flawed

implementation means. These findings confirmed the necessity of a real dialogue between the reform stakeholders with a focus on what they have common with regard to a change.

Theoretical and practical implications

The theoretical relevance of the present research is four-fold. First, concepts from two separate research streams, namely research on policy diffusion and research on educational innovation, were successfully combined to develop an analytic framework for understanding the success or failure of educational change.

Second, the educational change mechanisms identified on the basis of the innovation and policy literatures received empirical support from the case of Armenian higher educational reform.

Third, the study provides greater insight into the factors affecting policy diffusion from a developed country to a post-Soviet developing country, where differences in culture and history can play a role. The present exploration of the higher education reform perceptions of teachers and leaders in a developing country with a strong Soviet legacy, like Armenia, is unique in the educational change literature.

Finally, most explorations of teacher and leader perceptions of reform endeavours to date explore only one concept or set of factors in isolation and thus pay little or no attention to the combinations of concepts and factors, which can influence each other and thus the reform process. In the present study, cognitive and behavioural concepts are brought together to explore teachers' reform perceptions in connection with their change knowledge, beliefs about reforms, beliefs about teaching and learning, perceptions of the relevant organisational culture, emotions and causal attributions. Similarly, cognitive and behavioural concepts are brought together to explore reform leaders' perceptions in connection

with their change knowledge, the presence of absence of various policy diffusion and transfer factors, leadership approaches, emotional intelligence and causal attributions.

With regard to the practical relevance of the present research, the findings offer guidelines and tools for policymakers in developing countries to understand the mechanisms underlying educational change and the combinations of factors needed to trigger successful change. The analytic framework developed to map educational policy diffusion and transfer can be used to assess the status of future reforms and adjust them as needed. Second, guidelines derived from the present research findings can be used to improve policy diffusion, transfer and reform implementation practices within the domains of higher education and other domains in need of reform in developing countries. The present results can also help guide the design of optimal education policies and reform policies for subsequent diffusion and transfer.



• **SAMENVATTING**

Hoofdstuk 1.

Algemene inleiding

Aan het einde van de 20^{ste} eeuw luidt het verschijnsel globalisatie een nieuwe fase in binnen het Europese hoger onderwijs. In 1999 lanceert de Europese Unie het Bologna-proces dat tot doel heeft om enerzijds gemeenschappelijke onderwijsstandaarden in Europa te formuleren en anderzijds de economie in Europa meer kennis-gestuurd te maken. De Bologna-benadering heeft ook invloed op landen als Armenië, die als een post-sovjet republiek niet alleen een andere traditie hebben in het hoger onderwijs, maar ook een andere politieke, constitutionele en culturele context hebben dan de meeste West-Europese landen. Armenië heeft besloten om in het Bologna-proces te participeren en de veranderingen die hiervoor nodig zijn in het hoger onderwijssysteem door te voeren.

Het hoofddoel van dit dissertatieonderzoek is om een dieper inzicht te krijgen in de mechanismen die ten grondslag liggen aan de implementatie van veranderingen in het hoger onderwijs in Armenië. Daarnaast zijn wij geïnteresseerd in de wijze waarop de verspreiding en de transfer van onderwijsbeleid, dat geformuleerd is in West-Europa, tot uiting komt in de context van een post-sovjet republiek zoals Armenië. Ten slotte willen wij achterhalen, hoe succesvol deze onderwijsveranderingen zijn in de ogen van de direct betrokken en de docenten werkzaam in het hoger onderwijs en de initiatiefnemers van de beoogde onderwijsveranderingen.

Om de kennis over de onderliggende mechanismen van de veranderingen in het hoger onderwijs te verdiepen is het proces van onderwijsveranderingen in Armenië geanalyseerd vanuit twee niveaus: het politieke niveau en het vernieuwingsniveau. De focus van het politieke niveau is gericht op de wijze van verspreiding en transfer van onderwijsbeleid van ontwikkelde landen naar

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REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION IN A POST-SOVIET CONTEXT

minder ontwikkelde landen. De focus van het vernieuwingsniveau is gericht op de perceptie van de direct betrokkenen bij het proces van onderwijsvernieuwing in Armenië.

De dissertatie bestaat uit zes hoofdstukken.

In hoofdstuk 1 wordt ingegaan op de probleemschets, het theoretische kader en de vraagstellingen van het onderzoek. In hoofdstuk 2 wordt een analytisch framework ontwikkeld. In de hoofdstukken 3 en 4 worden de percepties van universitaire docenten over de onderwijsverandering en de implementatie ervan beschreven en geanalyseerd. In hoofdstuk 5 worden de percepties van de initiatiefnemers over de onderwijsvernieuwing en hun reflecties over zowel de implementatieprocessen als de uitkomsten van de onderwijsverandering beschreven en geanalyseerd. In hoofdstuk 6 worden op basis van de onderzoeksresultaten conclusies getrokken en wordt gediscussieerd over de betekenis van de gevonden resultaten voor de implementatie van de onderwijsverandering van het hoger onderwijs in Armenië.

Hoofdstuk 2.

Verspreiding en transfer van onderwijsbeleid: de casus van Armenië

In hoofdstuk twee wordt de ontwikkeling van een analytisch framework gepresenteerd om de onderliggende mechanismen van onderwijsverandering in Armenië te analyseren. We hebben ons geconcentreerd op de aard van de verspreiding en de transfer van onderwijsbeleid van de ontwikkelde landen naar een post-sovjet republiek als Armenië. De indruk bestaat dat dit veranderproces in Armenië moeizaam verloopt, ondanks de positieve houding van veel docenten ten opzichte van de beoogde onderwijsveranderingen. Om de onderliggende veranderingsmechanismen die een rol spelen te exploreren en te karakteriseren, is literatuur samengevat over onderwijsverandering en beleidsverspreiding en transfer. Het theoretische framework bestaat uit de concepten die in de twee theoretische benaderingen van het politieke niveau en van het vernieuwingsniveau zijn geïdentificeerd en geïntegreerd. Concepten als de dialoog tussen de

eigenaren van de vernieuwing, de inhoudelijke kennis over de veranderingen, die de dialoog en de uitkomsten van een verandering mede bepalen, werden geëxploreerd. De gebruikte onderzoeksmethoden waren een literatuur review, analyses van beleidsdocumenten en analyses van de antwoorden op twee open vragen die in een survey studie bij docenten waren verzameld. Uit de resultaten van de analyses kwam naar voren, dat een aantal belangrijke kenmerken voor een succesvolle implementatie van onderwijsverandering ontbraken. Deze kenmerken zijn: inhoudelijke kennis over onderwijsverandering, een geïntegreerde en cyclische benadering om de onderwijsveranderingen te implementeren, een dialoog onderhouden tussen de belanghebbenden van de onderwijsverandering, praktische bijstellingen van de vernieuwingen doorvoeren en ervoor zorgen dat zogenaamde 'second order changes' plaatsvinden.

De vooronderstelling is, dat als deze kenmerken in hoge mate ontbreken, een succesvolle implementatie van de onderwijsvernieuwing onder druk staat.

Hoofdstuk 3.

De percepties van universitaire docenten over de veranderingen in het hoger onderwijs in Armenië

In hoofdstuk 3 wordt de mate waarin de percepties van docenten congruent zijn met hun opvattingen over de onderwijsverandering in kaart gebracht door middel van de door ons ontwikkelde vragenlijst 'de perceptie van docenten binnen een context van verandering'. De vragenlijst is gebaseerd op het theoretisch framework en bestaat uit 77 meerkeuzevragen en twee open vragen. Data zijn verzameld bij 279 docenten werkzaam in het universitair onderwijs in Armenië.

Een aantal cognitieve en gedragscomponenten, zoals kennis over de verandering, de aard van de organisatiecultuur, opvattingen, emoties en causale attributies is geoperationaliseerd in items om de percepties van docenten over de vernieuwingspogingen en over de resultaten van de onderwijsveranderingen in kaart te brengen.

Twee scenario's kunnen in de data worden onderscheiden: een scenario dat de kans op succes van de verandering vergroot en een scenario dat de kans op succes van de verandering verkleint. Het blijkt, dat het scenario dat de kans op succes van de verandering verkleint in de perceptie van de universitaire docenten in Armenië nadrukkelijk aanwezig is. Een belangrijke oorzaak is dat de opvattingen van docenten over veranderingen in het onderwijs niet congruent zijn met de voorgestelde West-Europese onderwijsveranderingen, omdat docenten vasthouden aan de tradities en de praktijken zoals die zijn gegroeid tijdens de sovjetperiode. Daarnaast rapporteren docenten negatieve gevoelens over de verandering en de manier waarop de veranderingen worden geïmplementeerd door de beleidsmakers en het management. Docenten maken zich ernstig zorgen over de in hun ogen afnemende kwaliteit van het onderwijssysteem door de voorgestelde veranderingen. Ten slotte ervaren docenten ook een gebrek aan eigenaarschap van de veranderingen en schrijven zij het in hun ogen mislukken van de onderwijsverandering toe aan externe en oncontroleerbare factoren.

Hoofdstuk 4.

De stem van docenten binnen de context van veranderingen in het hoger onderwijs in Armenië

In hoofdstuk vier wordt dieper ingegaan op de perceptie van universitaire docenten over de onderwijsverandering in Armenië.

Twaalf universitaire docenten hebben op vrijwillige basis deelgenomen aan een interviewstudie. De docenten zijn ingedeeld in drie groepen op basis van hun score op de vragenlijst 'de perceptie van docenten binnen een context van verandering'. Vier docenten hebben een positieve, vier een neutrale en vier een negatieve oriëntatie op de onderwijsverandering zoals die in Armenië wordt geïmplementeerd.

De vragen van het semi-gestructureerde interview zijn net als de items van de vragenlijst gebaseerd op het conceptueel framework met betrekking tot

onderwijsverandering dat in de eerdere studies door ons ontwikkeld is. De centrale concepten in het interview zijn: de kennis van de docenten over de voorgestelde verandering, hun opvattingen, emoties, en attitudes over de veranderingen, de percepties over de organisatiecultuur en hun causale toeschrijvingen van de uitkomsten van de onderwijsverandering.

De resultaten van de interviews laten zien dat de inhoudelijke kennis van de docenten over de onderwijsverandering gering is, waardoor het belang en de noodzaak van de onderwijsverandering niet goed door hen kan worden begrepen. De organisatiecultuur op de instituten is niet bevorderlijk voor het doorvoeren van onderwijsveranderingen, omdat het eigenaarschap van docenten over de onderwijsverandering ontbreekt. De docenten geven aan dat zij weinig vertrouwen hebben in de manier waarop de leiding de veranderingen implementeert en faciliteert, waardoor zij zich weinig gemotiveerd voelen om hun dagelijkse praktijk te veranderen.

Kijken wij naar de emoties van de docenten met betrekking tot de onderwijsvernieuwing, dan constateren wij dat er sterke negatieve emoties zijn als frustratie, onzekerheid en ook angst om de baan te verliezen. Docenten voelen zich ondergewaardeerd als professionals door de leiding, zijn teleurgesteld over de resultaten van de vernieuwing, ervaren weinig eigenaarschap over de vernieuwing en hebben grote zorgen over het implementatieproces en de manier waarop leidinggevenden het proces van vernieuwing aansturen.

Opvallend is dat de houding van docenten ten aanzien van de veranderingen wel positief is. In feite willen docenten hun onderwijs wel veranderen, maar zij krijgen het niet gerealiseerd, omdat er in hun ogen gebrek is aan enthousiasme, zorgvuldigheid en democratische benadering. Bovendien worden de studenten niet mede verantwoordelijk gemaakt voor het welslagen van de verandering en vindt er geen open communicatie plaats over de problemen die docenten ervaren met de veranderingen in hun eigen praktijk.

We constateren in de interviews een overweldigende hoeveelheid externe en oncontroleerbare toeschrijvingen van docenten met betrekking tot de implementatie van de veranderingen. Docenten klagen over de incompetenties van beleidsmakers en leidinggevend, over de desinteresse van studenten en collega's en over de geringe kennis die er is over wat student-georiënteerd onderwijs en leren daadwerkelijk inhoudt.

De conclusie is dat de resultaten van de interviews bevestigen wat uit het vragenlijstonderzoek al naar voren kwam. Het gebrek aan kennis over de inhoud van de verandering heeft als gevolg dat er misinformatie en misinterpretatie ontstaat over de onderwijsveranderingen die van bovenaf door de overheid worden geïnitieerd. Daardoor ontstaat er bij de docenten wantrouwen over de veranderingen die komen vanuit West-Europa en ontstaat er ook onzekerheid bij de docenten die in hun dagelijkse praktijk veranderingen moeten doorvoeren, waarvan zij niet weten hoe ze dat moeten doen. Bovendien ervaren zij de veranderingen niet als een verbetering, omdat de veranderingen botsen met de diep gewortelde cultuur vanuit hun eigen sovjetverleden.

Hoofdstuk 5.

Wat denken de leiders over de vernieuwing? Reflecties over de implementatie van de hoger onderwijsveranderingen in Armenië

In hoofdstuk 5 wordt verslag gedaan van een interviewstudie bij zes initiatiefnemers van de onderwijshervorming in Armenië. De interviewleidraad voor deze studie is gebaseerd op het theoretisch framework en de empirische resultaten van de vragenlijststudie en de interviewstudie bij docenten. De interviewleidraad is aangepast aan de doelgroep en de zes interviews duurden gemiddeld ruim anderhalf uur.

De resultaten van de interviews laten zien dat de leiders van de onderwijsvernieuwing

enerzijds de ineenstorting van het sovjetregime zien als een goede aanleiding om het onderwijssysteem in Armenië te veranderen, maar dat ook de tendens van globalisatie in de wereld een belangrijke overweging is om het hoger onderwijs in Armenië aan te passen. De leiders staan enerzijds een vrijwillige doorvoering van de onderwijsvernieuwing voor, maar vinden ook dat indirecte druk en druk van bovenaf mag worden uitgeoefend op docenten om de onderwijsveranderingen te realiseren. Hoewel de leiders zelf een beperkte inhoudelijke kennis van de beoogde onderwijsveranderingen hebben, zijn zij van mening dat het management van de universiteiten, de docenten en de beleidsmakers er niet erg in slagen om de onderwijsveranderingen in Armenië tot een succes te maken. De leiders vinden eigenlijk dat de docenten te weinig gemotiveerd zijn en ook te weinig capaciteiten hebben om de veranderingen door te voeren. Feitelijk schrijven de leiders vanuit hun perspectief de in hun ogen negatieve uitkomsten van de veranderingen toe aan externe en oncontroleerbare factoren. Dit blijkt uit het gegeven dat de leiders ertoe geneigd zijn de teleurstellende uitkomsten van de onderwijsveranderingen toe te schrijven aan de docenten, het regeringsbeleid, de studenten en de samenleving. Deze resultaten wijzen erop dat er een actieve dialoog tussen de partijen, die de veranderingen moeten realiseren, op gang moet komen, waardoor er een gedeeld eigenaarschap van de vernieuwing kan ontstaan en de inhoudelijke kennis over wat de vernieuwing inhoudt voor het Armeense hoger onderwijs ontwikkeld kan worden.

Hoofdstuk 6.

Algemene conclusies en discussie

In hoofdstuk 6 worden de theoretische relevantie en de praktische implicaties van het onderzoek besproken.

Met betrekking tot theoretische relevantie willen wij op vier aspecten wijzen:

1. de concepten van twee onderzoeksstromen, namelijk het onderzoek naar verspreiding van beleid en het onderzoek naar onderwijsvernieuwing zijn bij elkaar gebracht in een analytisch framework waardoor succes en falen van

onderwijsveranderingen in de ogen van de betrokkenen beter begrepen kunnen worden.

2. De mechanismen die aan onderwijsverandering ten grondslag liggen, zoals beschreven in het analytisch model, worden empirisch sterk ondersteund in de casus van de verandering van het Armeense hoger onderwijs.

3. De studie levert een dieper inzicht op in de factoren die van belang zijn bij de verspreiding en de implementatie van beleidsinitiatieven van ontwikkelde landen naar ontwikkelingslanden met een post sovjet verleden zoals Armenië.

4. In het bijzonder is de combinatie van cognitieve en gedragsfactoren die zowel de perceptie van de docenten van de onderwijsverandering als ook perceptie van de leiders van de onderwijsvernieuwing adequaat in beeld kan brengen, een beloftevolle benadering. Deze benadering doet ook recht aan de complexiteit van een onderwijsinnovatie op landelijk niveau.

Met betrekking tot de praktische relevantie willen wij erop wijzen dat het onderzoek richtlijnen en hulpmiddelen oplevert, die van belang zijn om onderwijsinnovatie op landelijk niveau te monitoren en de mate waarin de implementatie van de onderwijsinnovatie succesvol verloopt vast te stellen.

Uit de onderzoeksresultaten komt duidelijk naar voren, dat het verhelderen van de inhoud van de onderwijsverandering, het aangaan van een actieve dialoog met degenen die de verandering moeten waarmaken en het creëren van eigenaarschap voor degenen die de verandering moeten realiseren van belang is om een onderwijsinnovatie succesvol te realiseren. Daarbij moet worden bedacht dat daadwerkelijke veranderingen in het onderwijs niet gemakkelijk en zeker niet snel in de praktijk van alle dag gerealiseerd worden.



• CURRICULUM VITAE

Curriculum Vitae

CV

Susanna Karakhanyan was born on 8 April 1971 in the capital of Mountainous Karabagh, Stepanakert, which was an enclave of Azerbaijan during the Soviet regime. Upon her high school graduation in 1989, the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Mountainous Karabagh broke out and made her student life at the Mountainous Karabagh State University full of war experiences. After marriage, she moved to Goris, Armenia, where she started her career in education.

After three years of teaching, in 1997, Susanna was recognised as the Best Teacher of the Year by the Mayor of the Syunik Region, Armenia. A year later, in 1998, she was recognised as the Best Teacher of American Studies by the American Councils, the US Department of State. Having found her niche in education, Susanna decided to further her training with a Master's study at the University of Pennsylvania (UPENN), and in 2002 she was awarded the Edmund Muskie Fellowship under the auspices of the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. During her studies at the UPENN, Susanna developed an interest in educational entrepreneurship and, due to her study successes, she was allowed to elaborate upon her interest and learn about the initiation of ventures at the Wharton School of Business. The driving force behind her interest in educational entrepreneurship was (and is) always to make real educational changes happen, which culminated in her Master's thesis on endeavouring to realise changes in Armenian education. She received her M.S.Ed. from the UPENN in 2004.

Upon her return to Armenia, Susanna observed a dire need for reform and started on a career in higher education. In addition to teaching, Susanna became Head of the Reform Implementation Department at the Yerevan State Linguistic University, Armenia. During her time at the YSLU, Susanna introduced changes

in the curricula, the manner of student assessment and both the teaching and learning methods used; the changes were based upon the principles promoted by the Bologna Declaration. Observing the need for greater change knowledge (i.e., a better understanding of how reforms can best be designed and implemented), Susanna embarked upon the present PhD research at the Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands, in 2007 with the aid of a Nuffic Netherlands Fellowship Programme grant.

In 2009, Susanna became Head of the Policy Development and Implementation Unit/Deputy Director at the Armenian National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA). She continues to work on educational reforms there, drawing upon her experience as a researcher and a policymaker. Her experience as a researcher has helped her tremendously in the development of a quality assurance system for Armenian tertiary education. Susanna perceives research as not a distraction from actual policymaking practice but as a logical extension of such.